

ACE|10261-1|\$2.50

They are rich and beautiful, and
they live in a private pleasure oasis
where survival depends upon
how well they play the game.

CHARADES

by VICTORIA
KELRICH





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

King's Rest drew the affluent, the executives, the owners of businesses. It drew the independently wealthy living on stock dividends. It drew the denizens of the Entertainment Industry. They purchased yachts, leased apartments. They were offered maid service and valet service; there was a caterer on the premises. There were restaurants and several bars. Their automobiles were serviced; their health was seen to by resident doctors. There were tennis courts and squash courts and two swimming pools. And as the reputation of this haven grew, others came: divorcees with adequate alimony looking for more secure financial holdings; credit-card millionaires; the bored, the desperate, the hopeful.

They all came to King's Rest, to the golden pleasure palace where there were no rules, no boundaries, no limit to self-indulgence.

CHARADES—
They all had to play the game to win,
or
leave paradise.

CHARADES

VICTORIA KELRICH



ace books

A Division of Charter Communications Inc.
A GROSSET & DUNLAP COMPANY
360 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10010

CHARADES

Copyright © 1979 by Victoria Kelrich

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review, without permission in writing from the publisher.

All characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

An Ace Original

First Ace Printing: October 1979
Published simultaneously in Canada

2 4 6 8 0 9 7 5 3 1

Manufactured in the United States of America

For I. W.

I

King's Rest Marina sprawls seductively across a hundred acres of beach-front property some miles south of Los Angeles. Its northernmost tip stretches up toward Marina del Rey, as if beckoning to its larger, more sedate cousin, inviting it to risk contact. Its southernmost edge curls inland, crawling over the landfill on which it is built.

There were swamps here, years ago, when the first land developers came and decided that something could be made out of the mosquitoes and marshgrass. There had been quicksand and mudflats and a sharp petroleum stink from the rich, clotted deposits underneath the swamp. Over the years the smell had lessened as the petroleum was drained by relentless pumps which bobbed, untiringly, up-country beyond Ballona Creek.

The developers had their way, as they had grown used to doing after World War Two. Marina del Rey had remained the property of Los Angeles County, guarded by Southern Californian memories of water monopolies and soaring land costs, of walnut groves turned to cement seas of parking lots, and of farm land now being sold by the front foot. King's Rest lay smelly and simmering in its unincorporated state, an anomaly, belonging to no county, an independent remnant of an old Spanish land-grant, just waiting to be stolen.

It had been called Goat Hill then, both for the odor and for the dwindling flocks which roamed the knobby hills behind the small, characterless beach. Hill of the Goats it had been

for forty years before that; La Cuesta de las Cabras for two centuries before.

King's Rest was its name from the first day a small group of speculators rode out to see it. They sweated richly in their heavy, Eastern clothes. They filled the air with their quick, nasal voices. They brushed at their trousers with unnecessary gloves held in manicured hands, and scuffed their brown and white wing-tip shoes in the damp, gritty soil. It was 1945 and the war was not yet over.

A few years later the Army Corps of Engineers would admit that it lacked experience in the building of man-made harbors on such waters and would carefully test its way into the construction of Marina del Rey. The Corps would survey and probe and chew away the more spectacular marshes at the border of the strange dream that was Venice. It would bring in massive equipment to trim the edges of the earth and it would bring in boulders to support the future and it would build with a certain care and innovation, making mistakes and rectifying them, and coming in for blame and praise in variegated amounts.

The King's Rest Marina Development Corporation, for its part, went into the garbage collection business.

Their white trucks brought the detritus of towns, counties, peripheral municipalities and the new, creeping suburbs to the site of "The Future Home of Southern California's Newest Living and Recreation Community." The garbage was dumped. At first it sank, bubbling down into the marsh as the dinosaurs and swamp beasts had sunk here millenia ago. Then, by the sheer volume of material, a bottom was undoubtedly reached for the garbage grew level with the land. And then it spread. It grew high in noisome piles that drew the gulls and filled the air with their cawing, shrieking cries.

Tons of gravel and earth were spread above the garbage base. The marsh water was pushed back toward its Pacific

home and now the basic configuration of the marina could be seen. Ocean-going dredges were floated in to take the first bite of the strip of beach and remaining swamp. The channel was cut. Fresh seawater ran in and diluted the petroleum-saturated ponds. Then they, too, were deepened and joined together until a harbor was formed. And the dredges moved in-land and deepened the harbor basin, nibbling at the walls of compressed garbage and gravel and stirring up the newly-settled muck of the harbor floor.

The garbage trucks returned and the gravel trucks and even a few boulders were added to the effort until two moles, two great fingers of new land, stretched out into the harbor. Then the new, bravely-won land was smothered in a layer of concrete. The heart of King's Rest, the marina itself, was ready to be sold and leased and subdivided and built upon. It had taken fifteen years.

The other, virgin land was left bare, awaiting the housing developers who had paid their entrance fees and taken percentages of the future. There was a lot of money invested in King's Rest. At each stage of the building process new businessmen had come in, buying out the original investors and then, often as not, reselling at a high price. Some of the rights to build, or to conduct business, or simply to resell, had changed hands twelve or thirteen times before the marina actually existed as something other than a paper property to be traded. Now that the land had come to exist in reality, rather than in a prospectus, it was time for a new sort of developer to take over. The subdividers arrived and bought the right to sell rights to those who would build the individual marinas that would make up the marina proper. And the housing subdividers came and drew up plans for buildings and the plans were sold to investors who built the apartment and business complexes and the three glass towers known as the Spires. And then the finished buildings were resold. And finally the people came, the ones who would live at King's

Rest, and those who would keep their boats in the slips and those who would run the restaurants and markets and other services needed to insure the continued profitability of the development.

By the time the first tenant moved into the first apartment in Newport Mews, at the far end of Hebrides Mole, King's Rest had proved itself to be a sweet little deal for very, very many people..

The first tenants, the people who would enjoy the cleanliness of new apartments, the ones who would find and define the shortcomings of the buildings, were transients, newcomers to Southern California. They did not yet understand the social differences among the various areas, they did not know that one was categorized by where one lived in that amoeba-like conglomeration of towns. They had come to California to find sun and the sea. They found it, for a while, at King's Rest. Soon they learned that their employers and their acquaintances reacted strangely to the idea of living so far away from some nebulous center of the imagination that was called Los Angeles. So they moved to the approved areas where one lived in a house, on a lot measuring one hundred by one hundred and fifty feet, where one preserved one's privacy and where one travelled far from home for entertainment.

Then, at about the time that Southeast Asia began to irritate everyone, there occurred one of those mysterious shifts of desire, one of those changes in opinion which become profoundly instilled in a people and which are belatedly named "a trend." Young, unmarried people and the more mature, newly divorced began to look upon King's Rest as an escape from tract homes, swimming-pool centered apartment buildings, loneliness and unhappy memories. King's Rest became a way-station, a hunting ground and eventually a repository of myth. One never lacked for a bed-mate, the story went. One met pliable, casual, willing bed-partners everywhere at King's Rest: on the street, in the

bars, in the elevators, at the tennis courts, even at the compactor chutes while emptying the garbage.

King's Rest was within an hour's drive of Los Angeles International Airport. A number of flight personnel pooled their budgets to lease apartments for communal use.

The six thousand boat slips at Marina del Rey were inaccessible. They had been leased so quickly that a black market in available space had grown up around them. But here were three thousand slips just waiting for the growing population of boat people. The three thousand slips were filled and demands were heard for the construction of extra facilities. Slip pirates became a problem for a while: squatters appeared, anchoring their boats in slips foolishly left empty for a day of sailing. The problem was solved by the inauguration of patrols and the issuance of identity cards for the boats.

And the Spires drew the affluent, the executives, the owners of businesses. They drew the independently wealthy living on dividends from a nervous stock market. They drew those who inhabited apartments owned by their companies. They drew the denizens of that flashy, tangled undergrowth known as the Entertainment Industry. It became an indication of one's success to be able to leave the approved enclaves of that area known, in its totality, as Hollywood. Only actors were still forced to cluster together in publicity-sanctified neighborhoods. Producers and directors, and financial princelings of unshakeable reputation and bank account, could permit themselves the indulgence of King's Rest.

They purchased yachts, or they leased apartments, or they permitted themselves one and the other. They were coddled in those three spires. They were offered maid service and valet service; there was a caterer on the premises. There were restaurants and several small, handsome bars in each of the columns. Their automobiles were serviced; their health was seen to by resident doctors. There were tennis courts and squash courts and two swimming pools so that they need

never venture into the ocean nor suffer the uncomfortable promiscuity of the beach. They were never offended, never threatened, by the shouting, playing, wooing, amorous young or less affluent tenants of Bar Harbour, or Newport Mews, or Viking Village.

There was everything necessary for existence in the Spires. There was even a resident bookie, eager to accommodate the ladies and gentlemen at their wagering.

And as the reputation of the Spires grew the others came, the credit-card millionaires who lived on plastic and kited checks. And the ones with never a nickel in their pockets. And the ones who lived on deferred payments and sincere lies. They spent their time playing bridge and backgammon, perfecting their bodies and their tans on the tennis courts. They knew when to win and when to lose. They were considered fun people, and serious.

Then there came the divorcees, the blonded, well-preserved ladies of thwarted intelligence who had served their twenty years in the marriage corps and who found themselves, at forty, with teen-age children, an adequate though not generous alimony income and the hunger for the protection of a man. They were of the generation which married or mistressed, but did not sleep around. These women took care of their bodies. They exercised and dieted, they were massaged and sauna-ed. They worked hard at their chosen profession for they were in competition with the honey-limbed, sports-muscled beauties whose very sweat was like morning dew.

And there came the bored and the desperate and the hopeful. There came those who did not give a damn but waited, with mild curiosity, for whatever adventure would befall them.

The myth of King's Rest grew and was spoken about and grew larger again and was written about in magazines of general interest, and of gossip, and was finally summed up in

phrases which unconsciously spoke the universal dream. It's easy to make friends at King's Rest. You need never be alone at King's Rest. Love, whichever way you want it, is for the taking at King's Rest.



II

David Nash gave one last look at the house which had sheltered him for the fifteen years of his marriage. Then he turned his back on it and with unseemly eagerness strode toward the gleaming black Mercedes 450SL. He wrenched open the door and slid behind the wheel.

When the car turned out of the long driveway onto the curving road which led from Bel-Air to Sunset Boulevard, David breathed deeply. He had never thought that cliches reflected reality but at that moment he felt a weight lift from his shoulders.

He knew that he should have been feeling regret, a twinge of sadness at the end of the marriage. The separation from the children should have been more painful than it was. All three of them had been made deliberately; later, after each of the births, he had found himself wondering at the miraculous appearance of a small human being after those few, sweaty moments in the dark. David had no sentimental attachment to the children. They were a nuisance, with demands and needs which he did not understand and which he found absurd. They seemed to expect something from him. They always seemed to be waiting for him to make a gesture or say a word. It was irritating and baffling and he had let it be known, early on, that they were not to bother him with whatever primitive, ridiculous petitions their uninstructed minds could think up.

The children belonged to Margo. She had wanted them and he had given them to her, as he gave her the other things that he thought necessary to the structure of a marriage.

time was reported as three minutes from meeting to bedding but Joshua himself admitted that particular incident did not count. The girl had come to his dressing trailer with the intention of sleeping with him. The truth was that she should have had the credit for the seduction.

“Slick as Quick” became a catch phrase. Joshua laughed at it. He was not flattered nor was he insulted. He truly did not care. Making movies was simply a way to finance his true vocations: boozing and adventuring. In the course of events he learned to ride, to fly an airplane, to sail, to fence, to hunt with both rifle and bow and arrow, to ski, although he did not particularly like it, to shoot the rapids of the Colorado River two full decades before it became a popular sport.

As he became bored with the process of making movies he began to do his own stunts, at least those which the studio would allow him to do. He climbed walls, took falls, did his own cattle roping in the three ill-advised westerns in which the studio starred him. As he became even more bored he took to trying more dangerous stunts, on and off camera. Some people thought he was trying to kill himself.

He finally married. His first wife was Costa Rican, his second Peruvian, his third Venezuelan. There was something in the Latin background of those women which intrigued him. Perhaps it was the independence lurking so near the surface subservience. Each marriage was stormy, filled with fights, screaming matches and punches thrown in public. His fourth wife was American. She was an Arizona-bred girl who took him out onto the desert and taught him how to cook over a campfire and where to put his sleeping bag in order to avoid the night rattlers. It was restful, after all that temperament, but he quickly came to look on her as a girl scout and that was the end of that marriage. She was too healthy for him.

As his career began to deteriorate his standard in women did likewise. There was a series of mistresses who inhabited

the yacht for various amounts of time, none of them lasting more than six months. There were the ever-longer binges and the resulting crumbling of his looks. He had been handsome in an evil way. On the screen he had looked a perfect devil of a man. Women in the audience always knew that no matter what dialogue he was mouthing, Joshua never could be a faithful husband and father. He was the consummate wastrel, good for a one-night stand, or a short, passionate, painful affair. They also seemed to sense that when the affair was over he could be counted on for friendship, or at least never to utter an unkind word about a former lover. The same could not be said for his wives.

Joshua did not marry again for several years after the girl scout. He continued living on his yacht, settling at one or another of the world's fashionable marinas or beach towns. He spent several seasons on the French Riviera, in St. Tropez. He tried to go back to Ireland once, but it did not work out. He was from another world now. He wound up back in the United States, shifting the *Moorea Cloud* from resort to resort up and down the east coast.

On a quick trip to Hollywood, three years earlier, he had met and married Consuelo. Nobody could understand why, other than that she was another Latin, very young and very beautiful. She was also coarse, vulgar and had a temper to match his. But Joshua had the experience of years in dealing with a woman's temper. He seemed to have tamed her, finally. Or perhaps he had simply fought her to a standstill. And now he was back in Southern California, unexpected and seemingly unwelcomed. Nobody had known he was coming. There had been no one waiting as the boat docked.

Malloreys allowed Joshua to show her into the living room. It covered the entire top-deck of the midships cabin. It was light and spacious, filled with rattan furniture which had been built especially for the *Moorea Cloud* in Cebu. There was one painting on the cabin wall: it was a Picasso, dedicated to

Joshua by the master himself. One corner of the room was taken up by a bar. In the center of the cabin was a large table covered with books.

"You've taken up reading?" Mallorey asked.

"A secret vice," Joshua told her. "Philosophy, believe it or not."

"Will you please tell me what's going on?" Mallorey demanded.

"Some day," Joshua said, patting her hand. He sat down on the large rattan couch, sinking back into the duck-covered cushions.

"Would you do the honors, my dear?" he asked, gesturing toward the bar. "Vodka and lime would do nicely."

Mallorey looked at him searchingly and then went to the bar and mixed two vodka and lime.

"Is there one for me?" a woman's voice asked, and Consuelo appeared in the hatchway leading to the sleeping cabins below decks.

"Yes, there is," Mallorey said, holding the other glass out to Joshua's fifth wife. "How are you, Consuelo?" The young woman had gained weight since Mallorey had last seen her.

"Okay." She took the drink from Mallorey, sipped it and made a face. "I like gimlets better," she said. "We've got some lime juice there, don't we? Yeah, I'll do it." Consuelo went to mix herself a vodka gimlet. Her face was expressionless, her eyes fixed on nothing. She refused to look at Mallorey and, even worse, she would not look at Joshua.

"You'll make it too sweet," Joshua warned her.

"I don't give a damn," Consuelo answered. "I like 'em sweet."

"I paid five thousand dollars to fix your teeth, *mi corazon*," Joshua said. "I'd prefer that they last you a while."

Consuelo shrugged. "We going out to dinner tonight?" she asked. "I'm sick of eating here."

Joshua nodded agreeably. "Of course. Where would you like to go?"

"Chasen's, in Beverly Hills. They've got chili."

"And movie people," Joshua sighed. "You'd think that after three years with me you'd have learned not to be impressed with movie stars."

"You're not a movie star," Consuelo said cruelly. "You're retired."

She looked at Mallorey. "Does Robert Redford go to Chasen's? I'd like to see him." The expression on Consuelo's face was one of exaggerated lust, a play-acting of passion.

"I don't know," Mallorey said quietly. "I don't go to Chasen's."

"I thought you were a movie star, now," Consuelo said.

"No, I'm not."

"You made a couple of movies." Consuelo's tone was hurt, as if Mallorey's denial of stardom robbed her of something.

"That's not enough. And my films were bombs."

Mallorey looked quickly at Joshua. There was an expression of pain on his face. Mallorey could not tell if it was emotional or physical pain, but Joshua was obviously in distress.

"Can I get you something?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said shortly.

"There's nothing wrong with him," Consuelo offered. She had downed the gimlet in two gulps and was mixing another. "Nothing wrong that a night in a bar wouldn't cure."

Joshua smiled. "Consuelo expects me to go on a binge. She thinks it's my way of settling in wherever we move."

"Isn't it?" Consuelo said acidly.

The smile faded from his face, but not because of his wife's remark. His lips became pinched and white. Joshua

reached into his pocket and took out a yellow tablet. He put it in his mouth and swallowed it with a gulp of vodka and lime.

Mallorey watched him carefully. A few minutes passed during which nothing was said. Consuelo was staring curiously at Joshua, as if she had never seen him swallow a pill before. Finally Joshua smiled again. His face and body relaxed.

"That's better," he said. His voice was deeper, his words slightly sturred.

"What is that?" Mallorey asked.

"Percodan. Synthetic codeine."

"He takes Demerol at night," Consuelo reported.

"What the hell is going on?" Mallorey demanded. "For God's sake, Joshua, just tell me and get it over with."

Joshua grimaced.

"I won't tell anyone," Mallorey promised.

"Yes, my darling, you're a good girl. You always were. How is it going with you, Mallorey? How is your life?"

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours," Mallorey responded.

"Yes, well, all right." Joshua seemed weary. "I'm dying." He rubbed his forehead. "Not this very minute, of course. It's simply that I'm going to die. Aren't we all, you ask? It's my heart. Do you know about the heart? This is, well, it's not the heart, it's the large vein leading to it. *Vena cava* they call it. It's rotten, my dear, like tissue paper. And one day it will simply rip apart and there's nothing to be done about it."

"And you're in pain?"

"From time to time." He looked at his wife. "Consuelo, my dove, my heart's ease; there's a laugh, isn't it? Consuelo, have you called your mother?"

"No." Consuelo had seated herself in front of the bar, removed her deck shoes and was picking at the cuticle of her big toe.

"Will you get a pedicure, you stupid bitch?" Joshua snapped. "I can't bear looking at you do that."

Consuelo grinned up at Mallorey. She put her foot back down on the carpeting which covered the living room. There was a satisfied air about her.

"Okay," she said easily.

"And telephone your parents."

"Okay."

"And arrange to see them."

Consuelo shrugged.

"I'm taking the two of you to dinner," Mallorey said with sudden determination. She had to get Joshua out of here, out of this enclosed, suffocating environment. If it meant taking Consuelo along, so be it.

"I'm not going," Consuelo said flatly.

"Fine," Mallorey answered. "Then I'll take Joshua."

"A drink or two, my dear," he said lightly. "There must be a credible bar around here. Then I'll come back to my loving wife. Can't leave her alone."

Mallorey heard the fear under the bantering tone. Was it possible that Joshua was afraid of losing that heartless little bitch?

"A drink or two," Mallorey agreed. "Get dressed, will you?"

"Oh, are they formal here? Is this marina infested with pretentious little assholes?"

"Formal, no. Pretentious little assholes, yes. You'll do with a pair of white trousers and a rugby shirt, or something like that."

"Not my style at all," Joshua grumbled. He rose unsteadily from the couch, smiling at his own weakness. His eyes were glazed, yet there was a ferocious expression in them. He disappeared through the hatchway.

"Bring him back early," Consuelo said in a calm voice. "He gets sick every night around eleven and it's a mess."

“‘Every night?’”

“Terrible pain. I have to give him a shot so he can sleep. He’s mostly okay during the day: the Percodan takes care of that as long as he’s in control. But when he lets down the barriers, when he gets too tired, it’s horrible.”

She looked fully at Mallorey for the first time. ‘Flirt with him, if you want to: he could use it. But don’t try to go to bed with him. He hasn’t been able to in months. When he starts getting worked up it causes awful pain. So you go easy with him.’’ Mallorey stared at Joshua’s wife. Her sullenness was still there. She did not appear distraught at her husband’s illness but seemed to be handling the situation with bitter practicality.

“‘Why do you bait him?’’ Mallorey asked.

“‘What do you want me to do with him?’’ Consuelo demanded. ‘If he didn’t have a woman to fight with he’d go crazy. I irritate him enough to keep him alive a little longer. He still thinks he can teach me, or curse me, or bitch about how I act. It keeps him going. What would he have if he didn’t have that?’’

“‘Why did he come back here?’’ Mallorey whispered. She felt as if she was learning secrets: secrets about a Consuelo whom she had never known well, secrets about Joshua and his true, inner life, a side of him which had never been understood by the world and which he had never shown her in the short time they had had together.

“To be close to U.C.L.A. Medical Center for one thing. Or to bring me back to my parents, for another. He thinks I won’t be able to survive when he’s gone.’’ Consuelo was speaking in a matter-of-fact voice. Only the glistening in her eyes revealed emotion and Mallorey wondered exactly what that emotion was. She seemed so cold-blooded about the situation yet she was drinking and her gestures were jerky and sudden and she could not seem to sit still. ‘He’s a very old-fashioned man, you know.’’

"How long?" Mallorey demanded.

Consuelo shook her head. "Months, tomorrow, five minutes from now, next week. Nobody knows. It's all a matter of destiny at this point. Whenever the vein decides it's had enough and ruptures."

Joshua appeared in the doorway. He was wearing a pair of white flannel trousers, a white silk shirt and a lightweight navy blazer. He looked beautiful, the aged version of the star he had been, but so attractive, so composed that he might have been an advertisement for the delights of maturity.

"You never dress up for me," Consuelo whined. "All you need is for one of your old girlfriends to show up and I might as well not exist."

"Quiet!" Joshua roared with some of his old vigor.

Consuelo cringed. Standing back from the scene Mallorey could see that the cringe was overdone and that Joshua was not taken in by it. Perhaps he knew what his wife was doing, how she was feeding him courage with her behavior.

"Are you ready, dear girl?" Joshua asked Mallorey.

"Lead the way, sir," Mallorey replied.

She took his arm again. She felt his muscles tighten desperately against hers.

"What time you coming back?" Consuelo whined. "I'm not going to wait up all night for you."

"Soon, soon," Joshua said irritated. "Just a few drinks."

"You better not sleep with her," Consuelo persisted. The tone of her voice was a perfect irritant. "I'll smell it on you. You know I can always tell."

"Shut up, you little whore!" Joshua roared, his voice full and deep.

"Come on, love," Mallorey said and took him from the cabin, leading the way off the yacht. At the bottom of the ladder she took his arm again, leaning her body toward his. Anyone watching them would have thought that she was

pressing against him, that he was encouraging her touch, that he was supporting her weight.

In reality she barely brushed against him, careful not to burden him with more than he could carry.

She would take him to the Spire Club, she would allow them to be seen together. She would look at him with adoration in her eyes: it was not difficult to do for she adored him. She would allow everyone to think that Joshua Quick had left his beautiful young wife on the *Moorea Cloud* within hours of docking and in that time had seduced another young woman.

If Consuelo could give the dying man an imitation of a fiery Latin wife, the least Mallorey could do for this old and good friend was to grant him the dignity of his legend.

V

Sonny DeLane's usual table was waiting for him in the Spire Club's Neptune Bar. The Spire Club took up a portion of the penthouse floor in Riviera, the northernmost of the glass towers. The Neptune was small, holding fifty people at most. Its lack of size gave it an air of exclusivity, making it the most popular of the rooms in the Spire Club.

Neptune was decorated in shades of blue, gleaming wood and polished brass. It was sleek and contemporary without being innovative. The room was kept dark to encourage intimacy and to discourage raucousness. Clever spotlights illuminated the back of the bar and a portion of the bar itself. The bartenders were always visible, the guests less so.

The entry was guarded by a host, a man of grim face and purposeful movements, who allowed no one to enter who might cause a scene or make the other customers feel ill-at-ease. Neptune was considered the best bar in the entire marina. It set a mood and retained it so that the people who frequented Neptune felt comfortable and at home.

Sonny DeLane had no trouble claiming a particular table for his own. A twenty dollar tip to the host when he first moved to the marina, his celebrity status, and the endless line of pretty girls whose names he could never remember had assured his ownership of the table of his choice.

After each program, after each taping session Sonny DeLane would come to the Neptune to rehydrate his body. He lost weight each time he appeared on television. It was the hot lights, and the nervousness that did it. It did not matter

that he bought aluminum chloride by the pint at the marina drugstore. No matter how much he swabbed his face and palms with the solution, perspiration would still appear. Sonny's back and chest sweated while he worked. Even the backs of his knees perspired.

So the first two drinks were to replace the liquid his body had lost and the third and fourth were to stop him from thinking about what he was doing for a living. The fifth kept him from feeling what he could no longer feel but was afraid he might suffer again. After the fifth drink he drank as a continuation of an activity that was as much a part of his life as the commercials in which he appeared.

It was a hell of a job for an ex-Navy man. He'd had a good war. He'd been close enough to the combat zones so that nobody could question his courage but not too close for safety. He'd made friends, he'd made contacts. He had risen in rank at the appointed times. It had been a life a man could look at with a kind of cynical pride.

He was a medium-sized man but he looked bigger on film or on video tape. Evidently he had a presence, an authority, that made what he said believable to the audience. It was the same kind of restrained conviction that had made his career in the Navy. Whenever Sonny DeLane said a thing was true, it was true. There was no way to doubt his word. Sonny sold his conviction as much as he sold product.

His managers chose carefully for him. He was too good to waste on questionable items. Only the girls were not quality. They were assembly-line productions, images of desirability. They were inevitably blonde. They wore make-up as if life was a soundstage and a camera was soon to appear. They all had big, interesting eyes painted with pointillist perfection. Their mouths were pale red and outlined. Swatches of color raced up their cheeks, inventing shapes and shadows where there were none. They wore sparkling night uniforms and the latest hair-dos.

They sat next to Sonny as he drank and held court. They rarely said anything; their role was not to speak: they were there like varnish on a portrait, adding luster to an artistic invention.

Sonny never slept with them. He had not been able to take a woman in many years. That was a hell of a note for an ex-Navy man. In his job he exuded an air of competent sexuality, an unthreatening proficiency. He was masculine rather than male. It was perfect for the television screen: he never seemed to be tense.

The girls were there to show their legs, to sip their drinks, to smile at Sonny and at those who joined him at the table. They were expected to touch him from time to time, to put a hand on his shoulder or his wrist as if the touch was a souvenir of some exciting voyage they had made together. And Sonny would reciprocate in public, placing his arm around the waist of the girl next to him. But it was always done tastefully. There was never a vulgar show of leftover passion. It fooled everyone except the girl. She and the others would not gossip because their future depended on being seen with the right men and then, perhaps, she was mistaken. Perhaps he simply did not care for her in that way. Perhaps there was something lacking in the girl herself and she would question her own attractiveness later, after he had sent her home in a cab. It was an extravagant gesture to be sent home from the marina in a cab. For Sonny it was an investment in peace of mind.

Sonny sipped his third drink and felt himself being inspected by the late customers just entering the Neptune. He had met many useful people this way. In this place there was no danger of being bothered by civilians, people of no account and even less money. Here there would be only businessmen, men on an economic level with him. Or men richer and more powerful than he who would provide him with stockmarket information or news of new products or

situations which he could use to his benefit. They gave the information freely for they thought him a celebrity and, as sophisticated as they might be in their own fields, there was in all of them a fan who slumbered, waiting to be awakened by the presence of a star.

Suddenly he caught sight of a ghost. For all of his own sophistication he felt himself eying the apparition with interest and a quickened pulsebeat. Joshua Quick had just walked in with an incredibly beautiful girl. She looked familiar. . . . Sonny wondered for a moment if she had ever been one of his silent companions. Then he saw that she was talking animatedly to Joshua: she had to be more of an equal than Sonny allowed himself. He put his mind to identifying her. There had been some tenuous tie. A film. There had been a premier in New York and Sonny, who was on all the "A" lists, the lists of people who must be invited to any important event, had gone. She had been in the movie. Sonny could not remember which movie it had been or whether he had enjoyed it or not. No matter: he had been there.

"What's that girl's name?" he asked tonight's blonde.

"Mallorey Swann," the girl said. She knew who was what in the industry and where they stood in relation to power and possibility. "Nothing much. A scandal-star. Vladimir Behr's girlfriend. He's a director."

"Okay, thank you."

Sonny called the bartender over with a glance and a twitch of one hand. "I'd like to buy," he began, and then changed his mind. "Oh, hell, tell Mr. Quick and Miss Swann that they're my guests for the evening, will you?"

The bartender nodded. This had happened before. He had seen Sonny make the same move a few times in the two years he had been coming here. It usually turned out to Sonny's advantage, one way or another. The bartender thought that watching Sonny operate was an education. He knew that Sonny never did anything gratuitously or out of pure friendship.

Mallorey looked over at Sonny when the bartender announced his intention. Joshua gazed blankly at the mirror at the back of the bar. He had heard but it meant nothing to him. He did not know who Sonny DeLane was. Mallorey smiled her appreciation of the gesture and then whispered explanations to Joshua.

He was drunk but a stranger would never know it. He appeared calm and dignified. In spite of his reputation, the days of rampages in bars were long over.

"Why ever would he want to do that?" Joshua asked, knowing the answer but wanting to hear it.

"He's probably a fan, my dear," she said.

"You or me?" Joshua prodded.

"I would imagine you. I'm not known the way you are."

"I suppose we'll have to ask him to the table?" Joshua's voice held the reluctance he was feeling.

Mallorey thought it over. "He's a regular here, Joshua. We might go over to his table. If you want to make a grand gesture. But you don't have to." She had seen his distress.

"We'll invite him over, if we must. But later, much later."

"Your drink, Mr. Quick," the bartender said, placing the vodka and lime in front of him and peering at Joshua with more than professional interest.

Joshua lifted the drink in the general direction of Sonny's table. Then he turned back to Mallorey. Having had his fill of looking at a folk hero, the bartender moved away.

"And how is that pig with whom you are living?" Joshua asked.

"I told you, darling, that's over."

"Why?" Joshua demanded.

"He needed emotional space," Mallorey said. "So we decided to separate for a while." She could feel the dumb confusion coming over her again. It was remarkable how clear she could be about Joshua, how sensitive to what he was feeling, yet when the conversation turned to her own prob-

lems all her awareness and understanding faded and her ability to react became paralyzed.

“And do you have another man?”

“No,” Mallorey said numbly.

Joshua had always been amused at other people’s foolishness about love yet there was no levity in his attitude as he spoke with Mallorey. “So you are free,” he said. “And unhappy.”

“It’s not that I’m so terribly unhappy now,” Mallorey answered him. “It’s simply that I can’t seem to think what to do next.”

“I always felt cheated,” Joshua said, “when I left my fantasies and faced the real world. You can’t imagine the times I thought I had found perfection only to learn that it was just another twat.” He shook his head. “But, of course, that was long ago, when I was still on the prowl.”

Mallorey placed her hand on his. She felt grief for Joshua’s pain but she felt no pity. He was going to die the way he wanted to, on his own terms. An idea came to her, bringing a strange sort of hope. She could very easily put aside her own problems in order to help Joshua. It suddenly became very important to her that he ask her to stay with him.

“But what do you do all day, my darling?” Joshua asked. “Are you working?”

“No, not yet. I’m going to have to find something to do or I’ll go out of my mind,” Mallorey said. It was the truth about her situation and, at the same time, it was a deliberate opening for Joshua, if he wished to take it. “And living here is very expensive. My capital is draining away.”

“Would you want to go back to modelling?”

“It would be difficult, at my age. . . .” Mallorey began.

“Anything that touches the pride is difficult,” Joshua agreed quickly. “Would you like to come live with us for a while, during our stay at King’s Rest? I’m sure there are all sorts of things you could do for me, and for Consuelo. There are things she has to learn and other things that I will be

needing. You could be a real help.' His voice was kind as he said the words but Mallorey thought she heard a plea in his tone.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," Sonny DeLane said. He had come up on them unnoticed and was bending over the table like an anxious headwaiter. "I don't want to be a nuisance, but I've been a fan of yours for a long time and I couldn't resist . . ."

"Of course, of course," Joshua said vaguely. He had forgotten his benefactor's name.

"Won't you join us for a drink, Mr. DeLane?" Mallorey invited, giving Joshua his cue.

Sonny slid onto a chair facing them. "I won't stay for more than a minute," he said sincerely. "I've left my young lady by herself and you know. . . ." He grinned in a man-to-man fashion at Joshua.

"I know," Joshua replied sympathetically. "You leave the little dears alone for a moment and they run off with the first young stud who appears. Frightfully annoying."

Sonny was rigid with embarrassment. He managed to utter an ingratiating little laugh before turning his attention to Mallorey. It seemed safer to speak with her.

"Last time I saw you was in New York, for the opening of your picture," he said gamely, trying to dredge up a moment of mutual interest.

"It bombed," Mallorey said bluntly. She saw him struggle for an answer and relented. "You must work all the time," she said with feigned admiration. "Whenever I see you or hear about you there's always something new."

"Same old stuff," Sonny demurred. "I do the lecture circuit and conventions. You know. And I see what's up, here and there."

"And what is up?" Joshua demanded belligerently. Mallorey sat back with a sigh. She knew that Joshua was determined to make a scene of some sort.

"This and that."

Joshua shook his head. "I don't understand *what* you are saying, old man." He stared at Sonny as if trying to decipher him. "Do we know people in common?" he demanded.

"Well, I'm quite friendly with some of the old Hollywood crowd," Sonny said jovially.

"The old Hollywood crowd is dead, or they're on their third pacemaker," Joshua said. "Even the old moneymen are gone. All the new ones are strangers. Dressmakers turned producers!" His contempt was chilling. "Or oil conglomerates. All those high-finance types." He was almost spitting his indignation.

"But they love the industry as much as the old-timers," Sonny said soothingly. How had he managed to put himself into this terrible situation? Why was he wasting time with a has-been like Quick?

"It was a game, old boy," Joshua said wearily. "The old-timers got a kick out of screwing each other on deals and then meeting at the steam bath and laughing about it. You never saw anything like it: paunchy old men in towels reminding each other how they'd stolen a star or a story. I suppose the new ones do the same thing but they probably don't enjoy it. It's the difference between robber barons and investment counselors."

"Are you up for a picture?" Sonny asked Mallorey, breaking an industry taboo. Past a certain level of salary or notoriety that question was never asked.

"No," Mallorey said.

"Oh." Sonny felt the fear which always lay waiting to surface. If you sat with losers you wound up a loser yourself. It had been a mistake to come over here. Putting their drinks on his tab had been enough: reigning royalty entertaining the dethroned. His mistake had been in trying to make it personal. It should have remained a showy gesture of homage. He felt Joshua's eyes on him. The man had an amused expression on his face, as if he knew what Sonny was thinking.

"She's being coy," Joshua said. "We've been talking

about something this evening, something we might do together. I'm enthusiastic about it, but Mallorey has to be . . . seduced into it. That's not too naughty a way to put it, is it?" Joshua's voice dropped to the level of shared confidences. "I know I can trust you not to say anything, Mr. DeLane," Joshua lied. "Your reputation precedes you and we know you won't say a word until the p.r. boys release it to the press."

"You know me," Sonny assured him, "I haven't heard a word you've said."

"Good for you, old man." Joshua turned to Mallorey and spoke as if Sonny were not there. "I'm getting hungry." His voice was querulous. Mallorey had noticed his new habit of stating his desires in this childish way.

"Would you like to join me, and my date?" Sonny asked. "They do a pretty good Chicken Kiev here."

Joshua was holding Mallorey's hand under the table. She felt the furious tightening of his fingers at this last piece of intrusion from Sonny DeLane.

"How very generous of you," Joshua said evenly. "But we have just found each other again after several years' absence. I'm sure you understand."

Sonny laughed swiftly, an understanding, manly laugh. In some way he seemed to be appropriating for himself some of Joshua's pleasure at having found Mallorey again.

"I can understand that perfectly," he said. He bent over Mallorey and instructed her in loud tones: "You be real good to my friend here."

"We shall be very good to each other," Joshua promised. His hold on Mallorey's fingers was so tight that her knuckles had begun to ache.

Satisfied, Sonny allowed his laugh to boom out over the room. Now everyone knew that he had shared a joke with Joshua Quick, that they were close enough for witty exchanges.

"Nice to see you," he said. And with a casual wave of his

hand, as if the dismissal was from him and not from the man seated at the table, he left.

“That stupid little impotent,” Joshua spluttered.

“Easy, easy,” Mallorey said, pulling her fingers from his grasp. “Stupid, yes, little, yes. But impotent?”

“I know the signs, my dear. Whenever a great bully boy fastens a dolly like that on his arm he is no longer capable of pleasing a woman.” He thought for a moment and then smiled ruefully at Mallorey. “Witness you at my side.”

“I think,” Mallorey said carefully, “that there are still several ways in which you could pleasure me, or any other woman, without putting a strain on your health. But, first of all: you have done your bit for the female orgasm in the middle half of the twentieth century. Secondly, my dear heart, I don’t know of any woman worth her salt who wouldn’t rather keep you alive just for the pleasure of your company rather than risk losing you for a few minutes’ worth of what you, yourself, described as much the same in the kip.”

Joshua looked at her from beneath his eyebrows, his head tilted toward her as if to better catch her words. His eyes were brilliant with satisfaction. Perhaps Mallorey was the first woman ever to tell him that his spirit was more important than his physical gifts.

“I still despise that stupid man,” Joshua said quietly. “and I intend to show him up by causing a small sensation. I trust you will play along.”

Without waiting for her reply he turned fully toward her. Mallorey saw the transformation take place and ever after would try to dissect it in her memory, would try to recognize how he managed the effect. The Joshua she knew was gone. Seated beside her was the Joshua of the screen, older, but as vital and sexual a being as he had ever appeared. He played to the room although his attention never seemed to waver from her. She was caught by both the act and by the acting. With one movement he pushed the table away from them. In the

next moment he was standing. Mallorey knew that every eye in the room was on them.

He reached down to her. His arm was around her. He lifted her to her feet. And then he kissed her, fully, lingeringly.

Mallorey became two people. The Mallorey who played the scene with Joshua allowed her head to go back, her eyes to close, her mouth to open. Her body swayed in toward his. She seemed to wilt toward him, submissive, conquered, the very image of the dominated woman.

The other Mallorey tasted the effort he was expending. She could feel the desperation in him giving way before the power of what he was doing. She knew it was a gallant spectacle he was offering their audience. As she cooperated in his act she held her weight carefully balanced away from him, allowing him to lead her into a better performance than she had ever given before.

Joshua took his mouth from her. "Come," he said. It was said quietly, but the word was projected into the silence of the room. She knew that he had gauged how much volume would be needed for that word to be overheard by everyone.

She kept her eyes on his, looking nowhere else until the elevator doors closed on them.

"Cut," Joshua said softly. "Well done, my dear." The elevator fell swiftly as he resumed his normal air and let fatigue and illness claim him again.

Sonny was feeling sick. That old man didn't care who saw him. He didn't care who knew that he was sleeping with Mallorey, that he had just seduced her in front of everyone. It probably gave him an extra charge, putting on an exhibition like that.

"What did you think of that?" he asked the girl. It was the first question of substance he had put to her since he had first met her. And this was the fourth time he had taken her out in the last month.

"It was wonderful. And scary," she said thoughtfully.

“Scary? How?”

“Like, it was enormous, you know? I never knew that people could have that much passion. I thought it was only something you saw in movies. I’ve never felt that way about anyone.” There was regret in her voice. She, too, was waiting for the one man in her life to appear and instruct her in the delights of life-long romance.

“Nobody feels that way,” Sonny protested. He was uneasy. First that awful scene which he had to admit caused him a violent twinge of jealousy and now this. He worried that what he and this girl were having was a conversation and it made him nervous.

“I don’t believe that. I think there are people who are capable of feeling that much love and desire.” Her voice was full of hope that it might happen to her.

“Have another drink,” Sonny offered.

“Okay,” she said brightly.

“He’s a good man, you know,” Sonny informed her, forgetting that he had been afraid of having made a mistake, of having been seen speaking to a has-been. “They’re going to do a film together, or something. Anyway, nobody’s supposed to know about it, so you just keep quiet.”

“Sure, I won’t say a word,” the girl promised. She would talk to her agent tomorrow, wondering if he could find a part for her in the film. And he would telephone around to try to learn what was happening and there would be a small flurry in the business for a week or so as rumors spread about Joshua Quick coming out of retirement to make a film. Then the rumors would stop and everyone would forget, but it would make for a busy week.

“Mr. DeLane?” a man said.

“Yes,” Sonny answered. He, too, in his way, was an actor. When a stranger came up to him he would suddenly radiate size and energy, his television personality appearing like a magic cape to clothe him for a moment.

“I’m David Nash.”

“Yes, Mr. Nash?”

“I saw you at a party at Viveca Bost’s.”

“Yes?”

“I uh, you were talking to Mallorey Swann.”

“Joshua Quick is a friend. And I know Mallorey, of course.”

“I was wondering, do you know if they. . . .” David’s voice trailed away.

“I don’t gossip, friend,” Sonny said threateningly. . .

“I’m not asking for gossip, Mr. DeLane. Mallorey is a friend of mine.”

Sonny looked at David with contempt. “Then why don’t you ask her yourself?”

David was in agony. He felt ridiculous, asking this stranger for information about Mallorey. He did not know what had prompted him to approach this man but he had spoken as if driven by something irresistible within him. “I’m sorry to have bothered you,” David said brusquely and walked away.

“Can you imagine?” Sonny asked rhetorically. “It’s incredible how they don’t respect our privacy.”

“Poor baby,” the girl answered dutifully.

David went back to his apartment and changed into a jogging suit. He was amazed at his own behavior. It was not like him at all to be so lacking in caution, to be so spontaneous and driven in his actions. He laced up his Adidas shoes, tucked ten dollars into the pocket of the warm-up jacket and left the apartment.

His head was filled with plans, imaginings of other approaches to Mallorey. He wanted her as he had wanted nothing since his first, ambitious days out of high school when he had planned the campaign of his life as a general might plan a lengthy war. In those days athletic scholarships

were still available and David had used his ability to good advantage. He had known all along that he would go to law school, that athletics, particularly basketball, was simply a tool to be used to pry a stable future from the morass of poverty in which he had grown up.

Now, at forty, he had taken to burning off excess ambition on a handball court but it was not enough. In some way it was too clean, too sterile. The slick walls of the indoor court at the Spires were no longer satisfying. It was too easy, playing against men his own age and older. The occasional adolescent who joined him on the court was soon fed up with the game. Competition was against their nature: there was something lazy at the core of those young people. To David the phrase "laid-back" denoted inertia. He was on the handball court not to experience a mystical joy about the beauty of athletics, but to win.

David had taken to running late at night on the almost empty streets of the marina. He had been pleased to see the return of the stamina he had lost. He had regained the ability to endure. Each night he ran further, trying to recapture the feeling of physical competence, the feeling of being almost invulnerable, that he had had in his youth. To David it seemed as if his youth had been temporarily misplaced, put to rest, as he struggled to construct an unattackable position for himself.

But he felt unsure, a feeling that he had not known since before puberty. Too much had happened lately. He had taken steps which, even five years earlier, he would never have contemplated. He was forty. He was at the top of his profession. And every day was more of the same, backing and filling, trying to avoid trouble. Trying to insure that nothing would damage him. He should have felt excitement at his freedom, at his status, but he did not.

He sensed that he was no longer in complete possession of himself. He was panting after a woman whom he had had,

even though it had been unsatisfactory. He felt cheated. There was more to Mallorey; she had more to give him. There was more in her for him to capture, expose, investigate. He believed that he would be unable to be himself again until he had taken all of her that there was to take. He did not question his feelings. He did not wonder at his obsession with her. But there was a desperation in him. It was as if Mallorey was the last proof, the last claim that he could stake to legitimize his life.

He ran now on avenues outside the marina, in an area which he did not know, on streets dimly lit and mysterious for what one could not see. At the end of a block there was a light, a flat white glow. He ran toward it.

It was a neighborhood playground, filled with the sounds of basketballs thwacking against blacktop, the scuffing sounds of sneaker-clad feet running and turning, the bounce of balls against vibrating back boards.

David stopped running and surveyed the groups of young boys and young men. These were not organized games. They were pick-up games, played by adolescents cheating their evening boredom in a ritual of challenge, flashy black street players jousting in the only legitimate form of trial by combat open to them.

David walked through the gate of the playground and sat down on a bench. He was fascinated by the style of play, the elaborate choreography of the exchanges, the lightning splashes of technical brilliance, the effortless glittering movements as bodies moved, stopped, changed direction in midair. The game was punctuated by sounds of hands clapping in appreciation, short splats of sound, palm against palm, and the occasional high shouts of congratulations or complaint.

One player drew his eye. The boy was not outrageously tall. He moved strongly and there was grace in the way he shifted his weight, veering and tacking with the rhythm of

the changing patterns of play. At one point he performed a movement that was so spectacular that David could not help shouting his appreciation.

The boys had been aware of him and had tacitly agreed to ignore the white man sitting in their court. But when he spoke they could no longer pretend he was not there. The game quieted down to a series of dribbles and ball passes as they tried to decide how to handle his presence.

There were a few more half-hearted plays, as if they were unwilling to display themselves before him.

The boy who had forced his admiration came near, under the guise of moving the ball around the court. He stood a few feet away from David, bouncing the ball tirelessly, as he waited for the other players to place themselves in better position. He eyed David.

“You want something?” he asked.

“Just watching,” David answered evenly.

“Yes, well. . . .” his voice hesitated. “We’re not too happy about that.”

“Oh?” David was genuinely puzzled. “Why not? You play real well.”

The other boys had drawn nearer and were listening. They were not hostile, nor threatening. They simply allowed the boy to state their position.

“We’re not performing for an audience,” the boy said smoothly. He spoke in a bland, California accent. David did not know enough about the neighborhood to wonder whether that was his normal way of speaking or if there was another dialect, a private tongue which was spoken here. He did not know that the boy was being generous, speaking to him in a language he could understand.

“Yes, I know,” David said, ignoring the meaning of the boy’s words. He spoke as he would to anyone, not knowing that he was not considered an equal in this place.

“I guess you played basketball, right?” the boy asked.

"Yes, in college. I had an athletic scholarship." David offered the information as a gambit of mutual understanding. He did not know that he was a generation out of date.

"Oh," the boy said. Then he was moving again, the other players following him in perfect harmony. They were near the far basket now, maneuvering for position, for possession of the ball. David found himself on his feet, watching the progress of the game.

An hour went by and the speed never slackened. Finally, several of the boys left, straggling away toward whatever the rest of the evening held for them. Only a few of the players remained and they handled the ball in a desultory fashion. They spoke to each other in low tones. For the first time David felt an intruder. Why was he standing here, watching these kids fooling around with a basketball? He didn't belong here. There was nothing for him here.

The boy who had spoken to him earlier drifted over. "Want to play some one-on-one?" he asked. The words were said with studied indifference. There was something behind the question, some other story taking place. David had no inkling of it. All he heard was the invitation. He did not hesitate. "I'd like to," he said, and took off his jacket.

The two of them moved out onto the court. David felt the ground through the jogging shoes. It was a feeling from his childhood. He saw the familiar yellow lines drawn on tired blacktop and felt at home. He smiled.

"Okay," the boy said. "Skeet here will toss it. Alright?" He indicated a tall youth whose hair looked like an exploded scouring pad.

"Sure."

They crouched against each other. David could feel the tension in the boy's arm as it pressed against his own. Skeet tossed the ball up in the air and stepped back.

David exploded straight up, snaring the ball away from the boy's outstretched fingers, surprising him with the vigor of

his reflexes. David heard a shout from the sidelines but he did not know what was said. He was concentrating on the game, on the boy, on the ball, knowing that the younger man was magically quick and almost unnaturally instinctive. David pressed the attack, moving toward the basket as quickly as he could, shifting the ball from one side of his body to the other. No matter how fast he moved the boy was there, threatening to overwhelm him.

He outmaneuvered the boy and leaped toward the basket. The ball left his fingers and curled through the hoop.

“Ooowee!” someone said.

They were into the second round. Now the boy was ready for him. He had been surprised by the strength of David’s play. Perhaps he had held back out of some innate courtliness toward what he thought of as an old man. Now there was no restraint in his playing. David lost control of the ball for an instant and it was gone, trapped by a hand so fast that it was a blur in front of David’s eyes.

The game see-sawed back and forth. The boy had the edge of age and street hustle, liteness and a gymnast’s ability to contort himself in the air, to move with preternatural fleetness.

David had remembered technique and training and an overwhelming hunger to control the game, to beat the boy on his own turf.

They were well-matched but after twenty minutes the years began to tell. The boy sensed it. David could see the realization come to him, could see the recognition in his eyes, could see his gestures become almost contemptuous in their fluidity.

And the heat left David, giving way to cold ambition and a killer’s determination. The same calculation which froze his face into immobility when he maneuvered in his work took him over. He found the reserves within himself. Although his lungs were pumping and his muscles aching, David’s body took on a new configuration. He ran lower to the ground. His

legs worked powerfully as he swept into a running attack which matched his adversary's in aggressiveness. Caught off-balance the boy could only follow.

Beneath the basket they grappled for advantage, seeking to dominate the ball, the territory. David leaped for the basket and was blocked. The boy was in possession of the ball. He never made the next basket. David was there, thwarting him, whichever way he twisted. It was a standoff and the boy knew it.

David was the first to draw away.

"Fantastic," he said, trying not to let the pain and fatigue in his body show. "You're something else." He shook his head in admiration.

"You not so bad, for an ol' man," the boy responded. He was breathing easily although his skin was shining with sweat and effort. David did not hear the change in tone and dialect. He did not know that the boy had paid him a compliment other than in words. All he knew was that he had won some sort of battle.

"I haven't played basketball in years," David said. And stopped. He was surprised at himself, surprised at the fact that he was trying to milk the moment for more than the boy was willing to give.

"I'm David," he said, unable to stop. And he held out his hand.

"Les," the boy said slowly, took his hand and shook it.

"Thanks for the game," David mumbled. He walked over to the bench where he had left his warm-up jacket. His back ached with awareness of the boys. He was waiting, hoping for an invitation to return, waiting for some sign that he had been accepted as a member of the team. He was appalled at what he was feeling.

"You're welcome," the boy said politely. He was standing with the ball, bouncing it with metronomic precision. No invitation was offered.

"I'd like to come and play again, once in a while," David

said. He felt horror at what he was doing. He was pleading for acceptance from these boys. They were quite obviously waiting for him to leave.

“It’s a public court,” Les said coolly.

“That’s not what I meant,” David replied.

“I guess. . . .” the boy hesitated, glancing over at the other players. “Sometimes, if we short a man. . . .” His voice trailed away.

“Thanks,” David said. He was curt in his humiliation. He had what he wanted, an invitation to play ball with these young boys, a grudging acceptance of him. He knew that he had extorted the invitation, that he had maneuvered Les into it, forcing him to speak the words as he had forced him on the basketball court. Under the circumstances the boy had shown more grace than David. It had turned into an ugly victory.

David zipped his warm-up jacket. “One of these evenings,” he said apologetically. He was anxious to be away from here, to suffer in private for the ultimate defeat he had won.

“Sure,” the boy said. Then he turned and went back to his friends. The pounding of the ball on the blacktop sounded like laughter.

David left the playground feeling more unsure of himself than when he had entered it. He was afloat, unmoored from the protective wall of certainty which he had built for himself over the years. His stomach clenched. He felt a vague pain in his gut, a needling pain jabbing deep into what was left of his hold on himself.

VI

Discretion had never been Viveca's stong suit. It was bad enough that Alec had goaded her into the stunt but Viveca had decided to do it on a Sunday. If she was injured or killed Alec would have to face an even larger, horrified audience than if she had chosen a day in the middle of the week. As it was, the whole affair had turned into a carnival.

Boats of all kinds had streamed out of King's Rest harbor. Early in the morning they had taken up positions within a mile off-shore, causing the worst oceanic traffic jam anyone had ever seen. Some of the boats were no larger than sail-rigged surfboards. Some had been decorated with flags and bunting.

The better sailors in the crowd passed the time skidding back and forth, using the empty hours in the pleasurable exercise of playing with the wind. Several over-loaded boats had capsized. The squealing, shouting passengers were all rescued, plucked out of the water by people in nearby boats and handed towels and beer. A great party was getting underway. There were a few collisions, none of them serious. Two coast guard cutters patrolled the herd, their disgruntled crews reduced to swearing at the uncontrollable, reckless revellers.

Alec took Viveca out to the temporary platform in the Riva. It was the most elaborate, most expensive power boat he could afford and, until today, every moment he had spent in it had been a joy. Today it could have been a cheap runabout with an outboard engine. Viveca could see the

uneasiness in her husband's face as he threaded his way through the jam of bobbing boats.

"I could have found another way to get out here," Viveca said. "You didn't have to bother."

Alec growled something but it was lost in the roar of the Riva's engines. "You're going to lose," Viveca shouted. The splash and hiss of flying water drowned out her words. Alec's face was pointed away from her, his eyes scanning the dark gray field of water.

"There it is," Viveca said unnecessarily. She was feeling very vulnerable. Her instructor was waiting on the raft that had been anchored a mile off-shore. The boat that would tow her in the run up the coast was tied to the platform.

Alec allowed the Riva to coast up next to it. He cut the engines.

"Are you sure you want to go through with this?" he asked.

"Of course. You trying to get out of the bet?"

She could not stop herself. She was making it impossible for him to back down, impossible for him to ask her not to do this stunt.

Alec snorted. He looked over at the instructor. "I suppose you've shared more than training sessions with him."

"Nonsense," Viveca said archly. "He's much too taciturn and healthy. He calls me 'Viv,' and you know how I hate that." She smiled at her husband. "Really, Alec, I'd think that you knew my taste in lovers by now."

"I only know that you're making a spectacle of yourself."

"Your idea," Viveca retorted. "Anytime you want to stop all you have to do is pay up."

Alec said nothing.

"Just think, no more excitement, no more adrenalin rush."

"You couldn't stop," Alec said, watching her as she unbuttoned the terrycloth beach dress from her body. Viveca

was waring a one-piece black leotard. Although the freshness of youth no longer clothed her body she was all strength. Her body was powerful, solid, sure of itself. Her upper arms were firm, her abdomen only slightly rounded. Under the slightly puckered flesh of her upper thighs the muscles were long and full. She balanced easily against the shifting of the boat. Viveca's skin was dark with a hundred hours spent in the sun.

"Here," Viveca said, pulling the rings from her fingers and handing them to Alec. "You keep these for me." She had kept only the thin gold wedding band.

Viveca moved out of the Riva and onto the floating platform. The instructor and a helper were there, arranging the parachute and its rigging.

"See you later," Alec said brusquely. He started the Riva's motors and wheeled away from the platform. A white plume of spray marked his retreat.

"Are we ready?" Viveca asked the two men. The instructor began buckling her into the harness. Viveca closed her eyes, allowing him to pull the straps over her, to snap the buckles into place. She did not look at the bright orange parachute with its strategically placed slits.

Alec ran the Riva back toward King's Rest. He passed more craft streaming out of the harbor's mouth. They all seemed to be heading north, up the coast. Viveca would have a great gallery for her stunt.

"I hope she breaks a leg," he muttered angrily and then felt a pang of fear.

He had never been able to tame her will, never been able to invent a challenge that she would not accept. It had started in Africa as another form of sexual titillation. Danger had sharpened their appetite for each other, honed their hunger until nothing could have matched the pleasure they took in their coupling.

Then, insidiously, the danger had begun to be more important than the passion. Toward the end of their days in Africa

actual love-making had become infrequent. It was as if the emotional drain which accompanied the ever-more complicated and dangerous adventures was satiation enough. There had been no more emotional energy to tap.

Now Alec could no longer remember what it had been like to make love to Viveca. All he could remember was the fear and exhilaration and fatigue of risk. And the added fear of loss that he suffered each time Viveca stepped into one of the arenas they had invented.

Alec tied the Riva to the inner edge of their slip. His guests were already on board *Nenuphar*, the Bosts' fifty-foot yacht. He clambered aboard and moved forward, letting go the bow-line before taking his place at the wheel.

"Mind the stern lines," he shouted to David Nash. Viveca had insisted on inviting him today. Perhaps she had her eye on him as her next lover. Alec started up the powerful motor, waiting until the stern lines were pulled in, and then carefully moved *Nenuphar* out into the main channel.

"Take us a while to get up the coast," Alec said to David.

"You're not going to watch Viveca take off?"

"No. I'd rather be there at the end than the beginning."

The *Nenuphar* joined the ranks of boats leaving the marina.

"It's unbelievable," David said. "Three thousand slips and they're almost all empty. Your wife certainly is giving them a Sunday to remember."

"How would you like to play host?" Alec asked, not wanting to discuss Viveca with David. "I'll have my hands full here, with all those idiots in their damn tubs. Why don't you see to the guests. You know where the liquor is kept and there's plenty of food in the galley."

David hesitated, unwilling to take on the responsibility. It seemed an imposition of intimacy, or unwanted friendship, to give him a proprietary role on the boat. Then he shrugged. Alec needed the support of someone steady. The other guests

seemed to be a fairly foolish group. Timmons Clarke was on board with a restless-looking blonde girl. He would certainly be no help. And Alec had every right to be nervous while his wife risked her neck in this idiotic way.

“Sure, don’t worry,” David said.

“Be sure they don’t just drink,” Alec warned him. “I don’t want anyone falling overboard because they’re sloshed.”

“Right.”

Nenuphar had outdistanced the lazing boats from King’s Rest and was moving steadily northward. Alec had the engines wide open. Ahead of them a large yacht could be seen, following the same course.

“That’s the *Moorea Cloud*,” Alec grunted. “Oh, thanks.” He took the beer which David had brought him, drank deeply and then put the glass in a rack which stood above the wheel. “Beautiful, isn’t she?”

“I suppose.”

Alec glanced at David. He was nervous and withdrawn, his hands fidgeting. His eyes were steady on *Moorea Cloud*.

“Want a closer look at her?” Alec offered. He moved *Nenuphar* into position so that they would pass the larger yacht within hailing distance.

“Binoculars,” Alec said, pointing toward a locker. David found the field glasses and trained them on Joshua Quick’s yacht.

“Pretty spectacular,” Alec commented. David said nothing as he inspected the other deck.

“Not many people on board,” Alec continued. “It takes a lot of money to run a ship like that. I wonder how much he has left? Throws it around. I knew him in Africa. He came down to hunt and I flew him to the Safari camp. Bugger was drunk from the moment he hit Nairobi until I picked him up a week later.”

There was no reaction from David. It was as if he were not

here, or as if he were deaf to what Alec was saying.

Suddenly David put down the glasses. "I think I'll get something to eat," he said.

Alec checked the heading, took a quick look to see that there was no danger to *Nenuphar* if he should take his hands from the wheel. He lifted the binoculars and trained them on *Moorea Cloud*. Mallorey Swann was standing on the foredeck.

"Ah," Alec said to himself. He put the binoculars back in the locker. "Fancy that." He smiled and turned his attention back to the job at hand.

"I'm seasick." Timmons was gritting his teeth, trying to hide his malaise. Selena watched him dispassionately.

"I will not throw up," Timmons said, "not in front of these people."

"Don't look at the horizon," Selena suggested. "Look at that beautiful white yacht we're passing."

"It'll ruin everything if I'm sick," Timmons persisted.

"Maybe Mr. Bost has something you could take," Selena suggested.

"Ask him," Timmons ordered. The sweat was standing on his forehead but he was gamely keeping his body turned toward the guests, exhibiting himself.

Selena left him and made her way toward Alec.

"Uh," she began awkwardly, "I'm sorry, but my husband needs something for his stomach. He's seasick."

"Should have taken Dramamine before coming on board," Alec answered. "Hold on, I'll see what I can do." He pressed the intercom button. Below, in the galley, David answered. "Get some of that Bonamine up here, we've got a lubber."

"Thanks," Selena smiled. She started to move away.

"Stay a while," Alec invited. "I'm suffering from the loneliness of command. Keep me company."

Selena shifted uncomfortably. She forced herself to look at him. He was regarding her sympathetically. "You don't want to watch him being sick. It's catching."

"You're right." She smiled. Selena felt a sharp satisfaction at her own health and a lessening of the shyness she had felt coming along on this strange excursion. In some way she also felt that Timmons deserved to throw up in front of a crowd of people.

"Want to take the wheel?" Alec offered.

"No, I'll just watch. I've never been on a ship before."

"Boat," Alec corrected her. "That's a ship." He nodded toward the *Moorea Cloud* astern of them.

"Aren't you nervous, about your wife I mean?"

Alec seemed to be concentrating on the rise and fall of the boat's bow. "Yes," he said finally. "I'm scared that something will happen to her. But don't tell anybody. As far as the rest of them are concerned this is just another one of our crazy contests and I only care about losing the money."

"Why do you let her do it?"

Alec eyed her curiously. "Let her? I thought all you California types were liberated and free and undemanding. Do you allow your husband to let you or not let you do what you want?"

Selena half turned from him, brushing her hair from her face nervously. She did not answer.

"Who wanted Bonamine?" David asked, appearing from below.

"Take it over to our athletic friend, would you?" Alec said. "He's in dire need. And tell him that if he's going to mess, he'd better do it over the side."

David made a face. "Don't tell me he's delicate?" he asked rhetorically and headed for the spot where Timmons Clarke was now sitting, head and hands trailing miserably over the water.

"Everybody's strange today," Alec mused. "At least, I

think so. Maybe I'm too preoccupied to know."

"I think this whole affair is weird," Selena said forcefully.

"How long have you been married to Timmons?" Alec asked, as if he had not heard her.

Selena looked toward her husband. He was clutching the handrail.

"Sometimes it feels like forever," she muttered, averting her eyes.

"Have a drink," Alec said with sudden cheerfulness. "We're all going to need one before this day is over."

On the *Moorea Cloud* Malloreys stood watching *Nenuphar* lengthen the lead it had taken. Behind her five men sat playing poker, paying no attention to the ocean, the other boats or the raucous regatta formed in Viveca's honor.

The men spoke in Spanish for the most part, remembering only occasionally to shift into English in an ostentatious display of courtesy toward Malloreys.

Four of the men were Consuelo's relatives. Her father sat next to Joshua. The contrast between the two men was striking. Where Joshua still showed traces of the finesse which had been his trademark, Papi displayed a peasant heaviness. His skin was large-pored and thick while Joshua's face was almost translucent due to his illness. Papi was heavy-set and thick. Joshua had been honed to fragility.

It was only when one looked at their hands, the one pair rough and work-darkened, the other pair as opaque as alabaster, that similarities could be seen. Their gestures were sure, firm and definite. They handled their cards with confidence. Both of them tossed chips into the center of the table with a similar flipping gesture.

The other men were younger and given to sullenness. Their hands moved with barely controlled agitation. All three of them had thick, wavy hair and dark eyes. They were brothers, unfinished versions of Papi.

Consuelo had been reclining on a mattress in the center of the deck. Now she rose and pulled her bikini bra into place, twisting her arms behind her back to tie the two dangling strings.

Mallorey saw the brothers flick a glance at their sister. They seemed disdainful of the spectacle she was presenting. Consuelo strolled over to the poker game, draping one arm over Joshua's shoulder.

"I thought you were going fishing," she said to her youngest brother.

"I don't have a rod and reel," he replied, sounding wounded, as if it was someone else's fault.

"Joshua told you we could rig up something, if you wanted." She knew that her brother would refuse to use any of Joshua's equipment.

"It don't matter," the boy said. "I'd rather play cards."

"Bring your Papi some beer," her father said.

"You're getting fat," Consuelo replied, refusing to serve the men with that seemingly solicitous comment.

"Get your father some beer," Joshua said quietly. Consuelo straightened, walked into the cabin and returned a moment later with four cans of beer on a tray.

"Glasses," Joshua said.

"It makes no difference," Papi said, dealing out the cards. "Now we'll see who knows poker," he announced, inspecting his cards. It was a phrase he used each time a new hand was dealt.

Mallorey watched the betting for a while and then went to join Consuelo at the rail.

"Look at them. Nothing in common except cards. I don't know why Joshua invited them. He doesn't even like to play cards anymore. It bores him."

"It's for you," Mallorey said soothingly.

"I'll never go back to live with them," Consuelo said passionately. "You know where my mother is? In the galley. It's just another kitchen as far as she's concerned. And my

sisters are downstairs trying on all my clothes."

"Let's get them up here on deck," Mallorey suggested.

"You don't understand my family," Consuelo told her. "That's what women are supposed to do: kitchen and try on clothes. I'm just some temporarily lucky girl who married a famous actor. And a *macho* at that. The most *macho* man they know. They expect me to be grateful and docile." She smiled bitterly at Mallorey. "I bet you didn't know I knew words like 'docile.' "

Mallorey smiled non-committally.

"My mother asked me, whispering, can you imagine, whether he beats me. Can you believe it? When I said he didn't she crossed herself and cried. A man that *macho* always beats his woman, according to her."

"I can't believe they think that way," Mallorey protested.

"No? Do you want to know who they think you are? They're sure you're his mistress."

"What?"

"Yes. They think it's exciting. It proves how *macho* he is, wife and mistress together on the same boat."

"But I thought your family was very religious."

"Oh, they're religious. But it doesn't stop them from loving a scandal, even though it's their own daughter. And anyway, it's mostly about you. A lack of taste is expected from a *gringa*."

Mallorey shivered even though she could feel the hot tingle of sunburn on her back.

"I'd better cover up," she said and untied the cotton sweater which she had knotted around her waist, slipping it over her head.

"I can't stand this anymore," Consuelo said fiercely. "I don't want them here and Joshua keeps inviting them to join us wherever we go. Once he flew them out to Cap d'Antibes. You can't imagine what that was like." Consuelo looked down at her bare feet. Mallorey saw that she was wearing gold-flecked polish on her toenails.

"Do something!" Consuelo said. Her voice was low and intense. "Think of something to make them go away."

Mallorey sighed. For a moment she felt the weight of the responsibility she had accepted in agreeing to live part of the time aboard *Moorea Cloud*. Joshua had been emphatic about it being good for all three of them. Mallorey would be doing something constructive that would take her mind off "that idiot," as Joshua insisted on calling Vlad. And Consuelo needed her companionship almost as much as Joshua did. Consuelo needed to learn how to behave in preparation for her widowhood. It would have been morbid coming from anyone other than Joshua.

"When I'm dead there'll be no one to protect her," he said. "You know how lethal that crowd can be."

Joshua took it for granted that Consuelo alone would continue living in the same manner as she had with Joshua. Further, there was the problem of the new man.

"After a suitable period of mourning," Joshua said, "and she doesn't stand a chance because she knows nothing."

"I'm a poor one to ask about that," Mallorey had protested. "You can't expect me to teach her when I've done so badly for myself."

Joshua had smiled at her. For a moment Mallorey thought she had seen compassion in his eyes and then it was gone, replaced by an expression of distress so obvious that, for a moment, she became suspicious that he was acting for her benefit. "I do need your help, my dear," Joshua had repeated and Mallorey dismissed her suspicions and capitulated with an almost sensuous feeling of triumph and gratitude. She wondered, briefly, why she should feel grateful to him and then dismissed that question, too, from her mind.

Joshua had been saddened by Mallorey's eager acceptance of his invitation. If she had been shocked at his physical state, he had been equally shocked at her emotional condition. This was not the Mallorey he had known: that girl had been

energetic and sure of herself, a blithe and tender companion. The woman he saw before him was ragged nerved and vague in her moments of repose. She seemed to have been drained of any sense of herself and went along with all of his suggestions too easily. It came to him that the girl he had known in New York might have possessed the confidence that comes with ignorance. Perhaps she had been sure of herself because she had been unaware of who she really was, unable to see any further than her immediate comfort, the day's job, the season's fashion. Perhaps she had been simply floating along from day to day, allowing life to happen to her rather than choosing a direction for herself.

Malloreys needed to gain control of her life. "That idiot did a job on her," Joshua thought. "She has to recuperate." In the next moment he admitted to himself, with some amusement, that he, too, might be doing a job on her. "You're no fatherly idealist," he reminded himself, wryly. "Admit it: you want her around for your own pleasure, too." Joshua had watched Malloreys install a few of her own things in the small cabin set aside for visitors. "It's late in the game," he told himself, surprised that he could admit it, "but you *are* a selfish son of a bitch." The impurity of his own motives settled, Joshua simply stepped back from the situation and allowed whatever would happen to happen.

With Malloreys aboard almost every day Joshua allowed himself to relax into peevishness. He became demanding and ungrateful. He seemed to feel that solicitousness was his due. It went beyond a matter of bolstering his spirits. Joshua now seemed to demand constant attentiveness and, at times, an almost psychic sensitivity to his shifting moods.

Today was a good day. The pain seemed to be quiescent and Joshua welcomed the respite with restrained joy. He was fairly even-tempered; he was almost the old Joshua, displaying a subtle, almost tart hospitality in which he saw to his guests' needs while appearing faintly amused by them.

Mallorey understood that her role today was to keep Consuelo entertained and to see to it that she did not fight with her family.

“Think of something!” Consuelo repeated.

“You know them better than I,” Mallorey said. “What would make them. . .disgruntled?”

Consuelo thought a moment. “Losing at poker. They couldn’t stand it. Joshua usually lets them win.”

“Really?” Mallorey had a half-smile on her lips. “Do you think they would let me play?”

“You, yes. Me, no. I’m his wife in the eyes of God. You’re a wanton *gringa*. North American women are expected to be shameless.” Consuelo grabbed Mallorey’s arm. “Papi’s a shark. Don’t let him fool you.”

Mallorey moved away from Consuelo’s grip. She sauntered over to the poker table. The men looked up at her approach. Consuelo’s brothers were eyeing her with speculative lust. Papi half rose from his chair in a show of gallantry.

“Can anyone join this game?”

The younger men looked as if they were going to protest but their father stopped them before they could speak. “With the permission of my son-in-law and host,” he said.

“Good. Joshua?” Joshua nodded. Mallorey pulled up another chair and sat down next to him. “What are you playing?” she asked.

“Seven card draw. High-low,” Papi said. He had passed the deck to one of his sons who was shuffling it carelessly. He dealt, tossing Mallorey’s cards at her with calculated carelessness as if to point up her equivocal position.

“Loan me some money, would you, Consuelo?” Mallorey called.

Consuelo came over to the table. “How much you need?” she asked. Mallorey eyed the stacks of chips in front of the men. “Oh, about forty should do it,” she answered. “You’re covered,” Consuelo said.

The brothers looked at each other, shocked, yet still silent. "Mallorey," Joshua said tentatively.

"Yes, my dear," Mallorey answered, looking at him with cold eyes. Her gaze shifted to Consuelo and then back to Joshua. The sick man subsided. He had allowed the uncomfortable situation to develop. Now he had to sit back and watch Mallorey put an end to it somehow. And he knew her.

Papi won the hand. Mallorey smiled at him brazenly. The cards went quickly around the table, the deal finally arriving at Mallorey.

"Let's change the game," Joshua said as Mallorey shuffled and reshuffled the cards. He refused to look at her. "Five card stud. Is that allright with you, Papi?"

"As you like, *mijo*," the man said. It was almost a joke for the men were of an age, yet Joshua insisted on calling his contemporary "Father," and was called "My son" in turn.

"Why don't we let Mallorey deal all the hands?" Joshua said querulously. "I'm getting dizzy, changing dealers every time. Is that allright with you, Papi?"

Papi agreed. His sons were quiet; they allowed their father to decide for them. They were uncomfortable, angry at being forced to play with this woman, this *gringa* whore of Joshua's. Yet they knew they could say nothing for it would be a terrible courtesy.

"Well, if you really want me to," Mallorey said, giving the cards one last shuffle and passing the deck to Joshua to cut. "I don't mind." She began to deal.

Mallorey once had had a friend, a card mechanic who had laughingly taught her a trick or two of his profession. So, smoothly, unobtrusively, Mallorey began to deal seconds. At the bottom of the deck, which she had arranged during the long moments of shuffling, she held an ace and two kings.

"Ready?"

"Ready," Viveca called. "Let's go."

She watched the boat move out, away from the floating platform. The rope attached to her rigging stretched until it was right. She stood on the far edge of the platform waiting for the pull. She could feel the weight of the parasail and the movement of the lines attached to the rigging.

The line hooked to the parasail began to pull and she took three quick steps forward hoping that nothing would go wrong, that the wind would fill the canopy. Her arms trembled with tension. She heard the parasail fill with a snap and strain upwards, and then her legs were running in air.

The wrenching jerk came and she was up above the water. The wind had completely filled the parasail and she began to rise. The line attaching her to the speeding boat tautened. She had been surprised during the lessons to see that it was always tight, a rigid umbilicus holding her to the back of the tow boat.

She looked up, twisting her head to see behind her. The red, white and blue parasail was completely filled, straining with its load of wind, and she was still rising. The boat pulling her was small beneath her, the three hundred feet of nylon line looking very fragile.

“Don’t pull at the parachute lines,” he had said, over and over. “You could spill air and find yourself twenty feet lower in a second. Just let the sail do its work, and I’ll do my part. You’re just along for the ride.”

She did not want to think of the end of the ride and the way she would plummet into the ocean, the parasail spreading like a shroud over her as it followed her into the water. She kept her hands clasped around the tow line, struggling not to hook her fingers into the harness which held the sail to her body. There were three quick-release ejector snaps there. One wrong move and she would have been cut free from the chute, falling toward the water with a force great enough to smash her bones to powder.

Viveca risked a look at the ocean, at the hundreds of boats

gathered beneath her. She could see the small white dash marks behind each one, indicating their movement northward. That great white ship was obviously *Moorea Cloud*. She could not pick out *Nenuphar*. Viveca wondered if Alec was looking up, watching her being pulled along in this imbecilic fashion. No, he was probably chatting up some girl on board, taking the whole thing as a joke, stubbornly refusing to show any worry for her. She wondered if he ever really worried about her at times like these.

The wind was burning her cheeks. The pull on her body was stronger as the parasail strained upwards. She hated heights. She had never admitted to Alec how she hated flying with him, hated looking down at the ground. He had explained to her that an airplane was safer than an automobile. Up there, in the air, you had time to fix things if something went wrong. You had five thousand feet or more, and the plane's gliding ability, in which to get your engine started, or your controls unjammed, or your tank switched over. She had still hated it, feeling a primitive, almost holy fear each time the small, two-engine plane had taken off.

And here she was, surrounded by nothing, her body unprotected by even the flimsy skin of an airplane. The rope tugged. She could feel the pressure on her ribs and back, the uncomfortable band of webbing between her legs and across her hips. The rope slackened and tightened again. That wasn't supposed to happen. She felt like a rag doll being shaken by some capricious child. Her head snapped back and forth each time the rope stiffened.

To the east she could see the coast road as a thin, light snake winding northward. She was too far out to see the details of automobiles. She could see no people. Directly beneath her the number of boats had thinned out.

The wind of her passage was loud in her ears. She had forgotten to cover her skin with mineral oil. If she made it, if she landed without injury, if she did not drown, pressed

under the water by the parasail, tomorrow would be full of sun and windburn pain.

"I should be enjoying this," she thought. "I should be feeling free and bird-like and exhilarated." She wished it was over.

Something was definitely wrong. She was floating lower, the rope showing a definite curve. She reached forward to grasp it, pulling it toward her, trying to take up the slack. It was heavy, immovable. Her hands slid on the nylon, burning the skin on her palms.

She felt a pang of fear. In the distance she could see the blur that was Marina del Rey, her destination. They were nowhere near it.

The tow-boat seemed to be standing still. She sank lower.

"Do something!" she screamed. The tow boat began moving again. The great, floating curve of rope was pulled flat into a more normal, safer configuration. "Thank God," Viveca whispered. The parasail jerked her painfully upward with a kick in the groin from the webbing. She began to laugh while tears streamed down her face.

"Damn silly woman," she berated herself. "You damn, stupid woman: why are you doing this?"

She caught sight of her feet dangling uselessly in space. Her toes looked vulnerable, pale and weak and ridiculous.

She looked up at the great, sliced dome of the parasail. The cut-out wedges looked larger than ever. Suddenly, for no reason, she began to feel happy. She began to feel as if she was soaring. She saw the lines as a filigree. Her life was hanging from lace. It was beautiful.

"Up, up," she thought joyously. She forgot about the height, about her fear of the empty space between her body and the water. The harness was comforting, holding her in solid arms of webbing. She felt as if she was swimming in air.

She looked down and the feeling vanished; she was

frightened again. Marina del Rey was coming nearer and she would have to begin the descent. It was the worst part of the stunt.

She had not yet decided how she would come down. She could unhook herself from the tow-line and simply parachute down on her own. Or she could stay attached and wait as the towboat slowed and began a great curving run, lowering her to the water. That was more dangerous. Yet, somehow, she felt safer with a link to someone else.

The towboat was changing direction. She would have to make up her mind now. Without thinking she reached up and pulled the release cord. The tow-line fell away from her and she was on her own.

“No wind, no wind,” she prayed. The air had to be still for her to fall directly downward. Any breath of breeze coming from the ocean, or from inland, could set her sailing out away from land, or in, toward the dangers of the highly populated, over-built marina and the towns behind it.

She was floating down now. It seemed, at first, as if she was barely moving, as if she was simply suspended in space. Then she could see the water change color and objects change shape and she realized how fast she was falling. The towboat had come full circle and was moving toward her.

“He knows what he’s doing,” she told herself. “Trust him, trust him.”

She could see the parachute’s edges flapping. Air was slipping from the parasail. Everything was happening too fast.

She hit the water feet first and plummeted under the surface, struggling not to choke. Her hands found the ejector snaps. Two of them parted immediately. The third would not give. She kicked her way upward, still scratching at the snap. The parachute was spread over the water like a great, patriotic stain.

“Keep away,” she told herself, knowing that if she be-

came tangled in the lines or if she allowed the collapsed parasail to spread over her she was dead.

She finally pulled the last snap correctly and the harness loosened. She swam out of it, away from the parasail whose edge was already under water. Viveca pulled herself up to the surface and took a great, roaring breath. She began to cough and choke.

The towboat was near her now. He was pulling in the parasail.

“Bastard!” she thought. “Me first.”

She began to swim toward the boat. A hand was waiting to haul her in.

“Nice ride, Viv,” he said laconically. She could feel the soreness in her back, on her shoulders, at her breastbone and across her hips.

“What happened there, when you slowed down?”

“Ah, that motor’s been giving me trouble,” he said casually.

“How far did I slip?”

“Not far. You had plenty of time to pull the release.”

She nodded. “Thanks for the lessons and the ride. I promised you a bonus for getting me ready so fast.”

He smiled and turned the towboat in toward shore.

“Let me off at the Coast Guard Station, would you?”

“Fine with me.”

Viveca did not speak to him again. She sat, huddled in front of him, trying to prepare herself to appear ecstatic, trying to find the energy to display a feeling of triumph. She felt tired, drained. She was faintly nauseated.

“I don’t want to do this anymore,” her mind protested.

“I’m getting too old for this nonsense.”

When he handed her ashore she was smiling gaily and chattering about her adventure.

VII



Elmer Fudd's had been packed with boat people almost the entire day. Now, in the evening, they stood three deep at the bar, waiting for a table. Most of them had been drunk with sun or with alcohol since noon. Their unguarded voices rose, filling the air with a screen of sound so loud that it was impossible to understand what anyone was saying. Occasional bursts of tinny laughter punctured the din, the women's laughter sounding like shrieks, the men sounding as if they were braying.

Waiters had to bend close to their customers in order to hear the orders. They looked like bowing courtiers accepting instructions from degenerate royalty.

Alec had reserved a table for *Nenuphar*'s guests. There was another table next to the one at which his party was seated. It had a "reserved" sign on it, and was the target of covetous eyes and the subject of many attempted bribes to the waiters.

Alec and Viveca, David Nash, Timmons and Selena, and two other couples of indeterminate age with tans so deep that they seemed indelible sat squeezed tightly together. The proximity and their inability to hear each other clearly had forced a kind of tribal intimacy on them.

Timmons was looking around the table, trying to see where his advantage lay. Selena sat next to him, with Alec on her right. Alec had one arm resting on the back of her chair. He did not look comfortable, but he seemed determined. It

was as if that arm embracing the air behind Selena was an unexercised limb, stiff and awkward from disuse. Timmons shifted his eyes toward Alec from time to time. He was checking the progress of Alec's unfinished gesture, obviously uneasy yet not daring to say anything. He did not want to make Alec angry at him: there was too much profit in the man's friendship; but he resented the liberty that had not yet been taken.

Selena held herself well forward so as to avoid being touched. Her hands were clasped prayerfully in front of her, the wrists resting on the table's edge. She prayed that Timmons would not blame her for that arm resting on her chair.

Viveca had not stopped talking since she came ashore at Marina del Rey. David, sitting next to her, could catch a word here and there. She was still rattling on about the flight and David was pretending to listen to her.

There was a sudden silence behind them, near the entrance. Then the noise level came back to its original intensity. David turned around and recognized the group pushing their way through the crowd. People at other tables had caught sight of them too, and a hissing commentary began to go around the room.

David's mouth went dry. He sipped his drink and watched as Joshua held a chair for Mallorey, seating her to his right. David felt someone touch him. He looked down and saw that Viveca had taken his hand.

"Poor David," she said.

David ignored her. Viveca increased the pressure on his hand. "Is there anything I can do?" she asked.

David shook his head, and pulled his hand away.

"I think I will, even if you don't want me to," Viveca laughed. She turned to her husband. "Sonny DeLane's with them. Ask him to bring them over."

Alec frowned and then shrugged. "As you like." He shifted his chair over toward the next table, holding out his

hand to Sonny DeLane. Sonny shook his hand as if he had not seen Alec in months. The two men always greeted each other this way, even if they had been together the night before. It was a ceremony in which heartiness was meant to replace the affection and esteem that was missing between them.

Joshua looked up at the intruder at his table. He was floating on Percodan and vodka, removed from the pain which had begun eating at his chest earlier in the afternoon.

He responded to Sonny's introduction of Alec with a murmured "How do you do," before turning away.

Alec nodded at Consuelo, not knowing who she was but accepting that she belonged with one of the two men at the table. His nod was noncommittal, a social amenity.

Consuelo recognized the uncertainty of his greeting and resentment filled her. She sat stolid and angry on Joshua's left.

"I'd like you to join us," Alec said.

"Say, that'd be. . . ." Sonny began.

"No, thank you," Joshua interrupted him.

"Please, Joshua," Mallorey said. Something was wrong. His peevishness had never before disintegrated into such stark rudeness. He could be cruel when he was not feeling well but he had always managed to put on a civilized front for strangers.

"I need a drink," Joshua said.

"We'd be delighted if. . . ." Alec tried again.

"Let's do it," Consuelo demanded. "I want to meet that gorgeous man over there."

"He's with his wife," Alec smiled.

"I'm with my husband," Consuelo said pointedly. Joshua ignored her.

"We're celebrating," Alec explained, determined that this would be his last effort, "and we'd like you to celebrate with us."

"We'd be delighted," Sonny said firmly.

A waiter was summoned. He quickly moved the tables together, melding the two groups into one. Further introductions were made. Timmons stared fixedly at Joshua as if he was trying to discover what it was that had made the older man a star. He looked like a young bride trying to pierce the secrets of a great chef.

"How are you?" David asked Malloreys.

"Fine," she said, and turned back to Joshua.

David was in agony. Joshua was touching Malloreys, one hand playing distractedly with her hair or resting on the back of her neck. Once, unconsciously, he ran his fingers down her arm from the shoulder to the wrist. In his memory David could feel the texture of the skin under the other man's hand.

Consuelo was staring at Timmons. She was not even trying to hide her interest in him. Her eyes flicked briefly toward Selena, taking in her nervousness and then dismissing her entirely.

Timmons was still looking at Joshua. He prayed that Joshua would notice him, would somehow recognize him as the proper heir to the older man's career. He wanted Joshua to speak to him. He wanted to ask Joshua for advice. He began to build a dream in which Joshua would act as his sponsor, would help him break into the movies.

Consuelo was smiling at Timmons now. He tried to ignore her, willing her to look at someone else just as he was willing Joshua to look at him. Consuelo's smile broadened into a grin. Her mouth seemed avid but the true hunger was in her eyes. She knew that Timmons was trying to keep all his attention on Joshua and she almost laughed out loud. She knew Timmons very well: she had seen so many of him before, males and females wanting to get close to Joshua, wanting him to make a telephone call or write a letter, wanting him to exercise a power he no longer had.

Joshua would not look up and Timmons became desperate. He was sitting so close to his big chance and it was not

going to happen. Worse, Consuelo, with her openly displayed interest, was going to ruin it for him.

Viveca was still making conversation, leaning forward to speak across the table to Mallorey. Her eyes took in everything going on at the table, yet she was still recounting the story of her parachute flight. This was the sixth time she had told it.

Sonny DeLane was aware of all the other people in the restaurant. He knew without looking that they were gawking at this table, that they were gossiping about him, about Joshua, about Mallorey and about Viveca, of course. He felt an immense irritation fill him. There was nowhere he could go without being recognized. "Why don't they leave me alone?" he thought. He looked around the room. Nobody was looking at him. He suddenly felt frightened. He had always tested his existence in other people's eyes.

"I'd like to buy everybody a drink," Sonny said loudly. It was enough to gain the attention of everyone seated near them. "Waiter," Sonny called. He waved one arm in a masterful way, praying that the waiter would appear and that he would not be left looking like a fool.

"Idiot," Joshua snorted.

"I want a tequila," Consuelo announced. Her voice was shrill with excitement. She was still watching Timmons.

"Silly bitch," Joshua muttered. He turned to Mallorey. "Look at my child bride getting all wound up. It's like watching a mule trying to act the thoroughbred."

"You're making her act that way," Mallorey said coldly.

"What's his name?" Consuelo asked Alec. It hadn't occurred to her to speak to Timmons directly. She seemed to be waiting for someone to hand her this new toy.

"That's Timmons Clark, our Olympic Marathon Champion," Sonny answered. He sounded as if he was selling a product.

"Ah, an athlete," Joshua said to no one in particular.

Timmons smiled. It was his blockbuster smile, full of charm and flashing teeth and curving lips. He was sitting tall, his chest expanded under the force of a deeply indrawn breath. He still hoped that Joshua would look at him, would recognize his potential. Joshua ignored him.

"Timmons is an actor," Alec said. "He's just waiting to be discovered." Selena looked at Alec, hearing the acid note in his voice. She took in the strain hidden under the joviality, the no longer hidden dislike.

"I'm just the excuse," Selena thought sadly. "He doesn't really like me: he just hates Timmy." Selena looked away from Alec, realizing that she felt disappointed, feeling guilty that her disappointment was for herself, not for Timmons.

"Oh, my Lord," Joshua groaned, looking straight at the younger man for the first time. "He's waiting to be discovered." A stricken look crossed Timmons' face; then he managed to smile again.

Joshua gasped and clutched Mallorey's arm.

"What's wrong?" she whispered.

"No, nothing," Joshua replied, letting go of her brusquely.

"I think he'd be terrific in the movies," Consuelo said. "Why don't you do something to help him, Josh?" She was smiling perfidiously.

"I wouldn't want to impose. . ." Timmons protested, even though Joshua had not offered anything.

"It's no bother," Consuelo assured him. "Josh loves to help young actors. Don't you?" she asked her husband.

"I'd be very grateful," Timmons said, trying to push the issue. "Maybe we could talk later?" His tone was insinuating: it sounded as if he was agreeing to a deal.

Joshua grunted.

Selena knew that Timmons was making a fool of himself. She had not realized how inept he was and she knew that he had no inkling that he was being played with, or that he was

being used for someone else's private war. She ached for him. And she began to fear for herself. Her acceptance of Timmons' behavior, the beatings, the mechanical sex, the feeling of being an appendage, and not a particularly attractive or useful one at that, had been made easier by her trust in his destiny. She had questioned his methods, and then had blamed herself for not having more faith in his judgment. She had simply assumed that he had an artful nature and that he was knowledgeable about how to go about reaching his goals. Now she saw that she had been mistaken. "I'm married to a fool," she thought, "and I'm the fool's fool." She felt a terrible anger begin inside her. Selena tried to quell the anger but could not. It shook her and her body trembled.

Alec felt Selena shudder and misread the cause of her distress. He took advantage of what he thought was jealousy and helplessness and put a reassuring arm around her. "Steady," he said. Selena realized that he was holding her and pulled away from his embrace, refusing the comfort he seemed to be offering. She wanted nothing to distract her from her resentment.

Viveca had watched the exchange with seeming disinterest.

"You're the idiot who caused the tie-up," Joshua snapped at Viveca.

"The very same," she answered, her eyes holding his challengingly. Viveca's voice was clear and lilting, the tone becoming more refined as her anger at Joshua grew. The man was spoiling her celebration.

"Did you wet your pants?" Joshua asked.

"No," Viveca said, managing a strained laugh.

"I did," he informed her, "the first time I parachuted from a light plane. It scared the crap out of me."

"When was that?" Consuelo asked challengingly. She only half-believed his memories.

"Long before your father stuck it to your mother," Joshua

said, slurring his words. His eyes were half closed and he seemed to be looking at the past.

"Oh, the good old days," Consuelo said acidly.

"I was crouching in the doorway," Joshua said, ignoring her jibes. "Erroll was flying the plane. He was drunk as a loon. If I'd been sober I'd never have gone up with him. I had the parachute strapped on and there I was with my arse half out the doorway and I suddenly realized where I was and what I was doing. Peed my pants right then. Sobered me up instanter. Flynn tilted the plane and I fell out."

Viveca smiled her appreciation of the story.

"Erroll? Flynn?" Consuelo repeated. "Who're they?"

Joshua reached across the table and slapped her.

"You shit," Consuelo said, holding her bruised cheek. "That's done it."

Malloreysat very still, paralyzed by fear. This Joshua was a complete stranger. She had not known him capable of this sort of violence. She had never believed the old stories about him, had thought they were publicity stunts.

Sonny DeLane wondered how he could disengage himself from the celebration. Joshua had gone beyond outrage, beyond titillation. Sonny remembered with aching clarity that Joshua had been known for barroom fights and embarrassing conduct. Consuelo was not the first wife Joshua had hit in public.

Timmons seemed hypnotized by what he had just seen. He had the look of a man who had just recognized something. He stared speculatively at Joshua and then his eyes lost their focus as he concentrated inward. He was filled with a gleeful vindication. Although he rarely suffered more than the barest twinge of guilt when he hit Selena now, suddenly, even that slight doubt was gone.

Selena was trying to hide by slumping down in her chair. Tremors shook her. Joshua's violence was frightening, and at the same time it was dismayingly familiar. She stole a look

at Timmons and saw, with sharp anger, that her husband was watching Joshua with admiration.

"I'm leaving," Consuelo said. "Will you walk me back to the boat?" She directed the question at Timmons.

"Sorry, I don't think I can," he answered. He was still looking at Joshua, waiting for the older man's approval.

"Take her home," Joshua muttered without looking up. "She wants fresh meat in bed."

David half rose from his chair, throwing his napkin on the table. "I'll take you home," he offered.

"No, no," Joshua said, "let her have what she wants."

Mallorey stared down at her hands. She could feel David's eyes on her and she avoided looking at him.

Timmons got up shakily and waited; Consuelo came up out of her chair, spitting a stream of Spanish at Joshua before turning and stalking out of the restaurant. Timmons stood there, unsure of what his next move should be. He could not believe that the older man was actually telling him to make love to Consuelo. It seemed unreal, but that was what it seemed to be. The idea came to him that maybe that was his part of the deal, even though nothing precise had been said. But how could Joshua embarrass himself in public like that? It suddenly came to Timmons that he, himself, was being humiliated in public. But it could be worth it.

"Joshua," Mallorey said tentatively.

"Shut up, my dear," Joshua answered. There was fatigue in his voice. He looked up at Timmons. He seemed very tired. "Well?" he said to the younger man.

Timmons pushed back his chair, hesitated, and then hurried to catch up with Consuelo.

There was a short, uncomfortable silence. Sonny DeLane broke it by asking: "Has Alec paid off yet?"

"No," Viveca replied, relieved to be changing the subject. "He hasn't. How about it, darling?"

"I'll call the bank tomorrow," Alec said dutifully. He was

leaning toward Selena, patting her hand. In her distress she seemed unaware of him touching her.

"I'd have asked for it in cash," Sonny boomed, laughing as if he had just told a joke. His voice rose about the noise in the room.

"I have to leave," Joshua said quietly to Mallorey.

"Don't you want some dinner?"

"I have to leave," he repeated. "I'm not well."

Mallorey gripped his hand. "Do you want to go to *Moorea Cloud*?"

Joshua suddenly looked older than his age. "Mallorey," he said with desperation. He could not continue. He was looking up over the heads of the people in the room but he was not seeing them. He seemed to be concentrating.

"Mallorey, I think I have to go to the hospital." He said it calmly, as if discussing an outing for which he was not quite prepared.

Mallorey stood and leaned over him. "Do you need an ambulance?"

"No. Just take me in your car."

"Can you stand up?"

"Yes." Joshua pushed himself up out of his chair. "Excuse me," he said politely to Viveca, "I hope I did not ruin the party."

"All is forgiven," Viveca answered. She had taken in the situation with a glance. "David, help him," she ordered.

David looked at Joshua and saw Mallorey holding him. At first he was numb with rage, seeing Mallorey with her arms around the other man. Then he realized that she was taking his full weight in her embrace. David went over to Joshua and, with a gesture, offered to steady him. Joshua waved him off. He was in obvious pain and seemed to have shrunk in size in the last few minutes. The wrinkles on his face were more prominent and his permanent tan had faded to a jaundiced yellow. Joshua was gathered in on himself, as if trying

to encircle the pain, to contain it within the boundaries set by his will.

“Walk in front of us,” Mallorey said to David.

David led the way from the restaurant, clearing a path through the crowd. Once outside Mallorey handed him her car keys. “The silver Porsche, black roof.”

He brought the car to a squealing stop in front of Mallorey. He helped put Joshua in the car. “Do you want me to take him?” David offered.

“No, thank you,” Mallorey said. “I’d better stick with him.”

David nodded and stepped back. He felt relieved, bizarrely happy. Mallorey was with Joshua because the old man was sick, not because she loved him.

“You might tell Consuelo,” Mallorey said just before she pulled the car into traffic.

Joshua grunted with pain.

“Can you hold on?” Mallorey asked, looking at him worriedly. He was hunched in the seat, both hands pressing against the right side of his chest as if the pain and disintegration of his body could be held back by that gesture.

“I will,” he said in a faraway voice. “I won’t mess your car. Wouldn’t be fair to die on you right here.”

“You’re not going to die,” Mallorey said, accelerating on to the freeway. “We haven’t gone to Hong Kong together, as you promised.” There were tears in her voice.

“Maybe, maybe not,” he gasped as the pain intensified. “Ah, Lord, ‘tis a horrid thing, this dyin’ business.” He had lapsed into the accent of his youth, the accent that had been so carefully trained out of him more than thirty years ago.

The speedometer needle was holding at eighty.

“Don’t kill yerself just fur my sake,” Joshua said.

“Shut up and hold on,” Mallorey cried.

The road was sliding under the wheels at a dizzying speed, yet she felt as if they were hardly moving. The ride seemed to

take an infinite time. Off-ramps crawled past them in slow motion.

“Take the next exit,” Joshua said.

They reached the emergency entrance at the medical center. Mallorey leaped from the car and raced through the self-opening doors. She saw someone in white and grabbed at him, shouting incoherently.

It went very quickly. They had Joshua out of the car and onto a gurney and then Mallorey was running beside the swiftly moving cart.

“Mallorey,” Joshua said, looking for her in the mass of bodies and faces and hands surrounding him.

“Here, love,” she answered. They slewed around a corner and into a treatment room.

“Mallorey!” Joshua called again. She leaned over him as the hands reached to lift him onto the table.

“Kiss me,” Joshua asked.

“Joshua?”

“You’ll have to leave, Miss,” someone said.

“Kiss me,” Joshua repeated. Mallorey fastened her mouth to his, kissing him deeply. He could barely respond. Hands tried to pull her away but she resisted so strongly that they left her alone. Eyes looked at her curiously. People came and went. She stood with one hand on Joshua’s shoulder, moving only to allow them access to his head while they work on him.

“Mrs. Quick?” someone asked.

“No.”

“Where is Mrs. Quick?”

Mallorey gestured vaguely.

“You ought to telephone her.” Mallorey looked up at the person talking to her. “You should telephone her right away.”

“He’s dying.” It was half question, half statement.

“It doesn’t look good.” A young woman was speaking.

Mallorey noticed that her hair needed combing. Bits of it were flying around her face and strands had come loose from the knot at the back of her neck.

“I’ll stay with him.”

“Are you a relative?”

“I’m more than that.” Her tone was final, offering no room for contradiction. The young woman backed away from her.

Mallorey looked up at the intravenous rigging. She watched the slow drip through its coils of clear tubing. Joshua was breathing noisily, or perhaps it was the sound of the oxygen. There was a shrill pinging noise coming from the monitor to which he had been attached.

“What’s she doing here?” a new voice said. Mallorey ignored it, as well as the whispered exchanges that followed.

Joshua was staring at the ceiling. Mallorey leaned over him. He continued staring and she could not be sure if he saw anything. She remained in that position for a long time until someone finally brought her a high stool.

Two hours later he was still alive. Arguments began as to whether or not he should be moved to the cardiac care unit. Mallorey paid no attention to them; all her energy was concentrated on watching Joshua. She did not succumb to the desperate romanticism of begging him to live. She simply sat there, occasionally stroking his hair. From time to time Joshua opened his eyes.

Consuelo arrived accompanied by an embarrassed Timmons, and David looking very pale. Mallorey saw that Consuelo could not bear the sight of needles and dripping solutions and the mechanisms which supported life. Mallorey urged her to go back to the marina, freeing her from the death watch.

Joshua was still alive the next morning. Mallorey walked along beside him as he was moved to the coronary care unit. They had given up protesting her presence after seeing that

nothing could move her. The shocking spectacle of his wife leaving Joshua in the care of his supposed mistress had shaken the normally hardened staff.

Mallorey watched them put him in a new bed. She watched them hook him up to the monitors. Joshua opened his eyes and recognized her. She smiled at him. He managed to nod.

She remained there, leaving only to use the restroom and to eat a tasteless meal that one of the nurses brought her. By now the staff had recognized her and gossip about them had spread beyond the hospital. Newsmen had gathered outside, clogging the hospital lobby and upsetting hospital routine as they attempted to sneak up to the cardiac unit.

At the beginning of the third day Mallorey could no longer bear sitting silent. She began talking to Joshua, at first scolding him for refusing to respond to her voice, later recounting the pain of her life, even later telling him stories about her life in the movie business, gossiping about people, reliving the ridiculous adventures of the last five years. She talked steadily for almost six hours.

At three in the afternoon Joshua opened his eyes and looked directly at her. He smiled through the oxygen mask and then, above all the whirring, chukking, pinging noises of the life support mechanisms, she heard him chuckle.

"I'll be back in a couple of hours," Mallorey said hoarsely. He nodded. At that moment they both knew that this time he would live.

Timmons had found Consuelo leaning against a parked car, waiting for him. When he came up to her she glared at him, daring him to comment on the scene which had led him here. Timmons tried to smile at her but his nerves were stretched too tight: the smile came out as a gargoyle grin.

"Why are you laughing?" Consuelo demanded.

"I'm not," Timmons said and tried to stop smiling. His mouth would not obey him.

"You look stupid," Consuelo spat. Timmons put his hand out, almost touching her. Then he hesitated. He still could not believe he was with Joshua's wife and that he was expected to make love to her. There had to be some mistake; he must have misunderstood. He suddenly felt as if this was a trap or a test he was expected to pass. The problem was that he did not know what the criterion of success was in these matters.

"I love my husband," Consuelo whined.

"But you want me," Timmons said carefully. Consuelo did not answer. Timmons put his hand out again and touched Consuelo's shoulder. He moved closer to her and put his arm around her, holding her lightly as if testing how much contact she would permit.

"If you're going to hold me then hold me," Consuelo demanded. "I'm sick of being careful. God, I want you to, to. . ." her voice stopped, the words blocked in her throat.

Timmons tightened his arm around her and then stepped forward until he was standing against her. He pulled her tight against his body, feeling her breasts flatten against his chest, feeling the arch of her pelvis fit itself against his.

"Kiss me," Consuelo demanded. "I don't want to have to tell you what to do." She sounded desperate.

Timmons looked at her mouth. Her lips were full and dark. They seemed to be covered with some shiny substance that made them gleam. He hesitated for a moment, reluctant to put his mouth on hers. Timmons had never liked kissing his women. It had seemed to him more intimate, more dangerous a gesture than love-making itself. When he had been growing up he had always been uneasy when, in the movies, couples kissed. Those Hollywood kisses had seemed almost frightening in their intensity. At one time he had even felt that the actors seemed to be devouring each other when they kissed. For Timmons the touching of lips, the opening mouths, the play of tongues had taken on an erotic power

more profound than the act of entering a woman. When Timmons made love he was always aware of himself as separate. He could keep himself apart and conscious of what he was doing. But kissing demanded a more refined attention to the other person. It was a beginning that was an end in itself. Timmons rarely gave his mouth.

He kissed Consuelo, feeling her come alive under the pressure and movement of his lips. She was grasping at him, her arms gripping him, her mouth sucking at his. He could taste her saliva and smell the pungent odor of tequila, the acid taint of lime on her breath.

He lifted his head, still holding her tightly. He wanted to make love to her now, if only to be able to stop kissing her. "I'll take you home," Timmons said and began pulling her along.

"I want you to. . . ." Consuelo began, but Timmons interrupted her. "Shut up," he said, his voice rasping. Consuelo leaned against him.

They were awkward together for the first few steps, their strides uncoordinated so that they jerked together and apart as they walked. Consuelo's hip bumped against Timmons and he could feel the solidity of her body and its muscular strength.

Timmons felt no qualms now; it even seemed to him that he was obeying orders. Joshua had forced this. The old man wanted Timmons for his wife. He had as much as said so in public.

"You really want it, don't you, baby?" Timmons said. It was not a question.

Consuelo shivered and leaned her head against his shoulder. "Yes," she said through gritted teeth.

Timmons never questioned what went on around him, he never searched for the profounder meanings of occurrences. Timmons believed that people meant what they said. If he found out they were lying, then he assumed that the truth was

the exact opposite of what they said. Timmons did not deal in nuance. He could not imagine that life could be played like a chess game, each move a trap or a preparation for attack. In some ways Timmons' preoccupation with himself was truly innocent.

They took the long way round to Portofino. Now they were moving in concert, brushing against each other. Consuelo had put her arm around Timmons' waist. Her hand was resting on his hip bone and she could feel the smooth sliding of the muscles there as he walked. There was no give in Timmons, no layer of slack to be pressed before the substance of the body could be reached. Her hand grew warm against his clothing and she could feel the heat of his arm around her.

They reached *Moorea Cloud* and clambered on board. Timmons watched Consuelo remove her shoes and he did the same, letting go of her in order to do so. The place where his arm had rested turned icy cold as the night wind flowed around them.

"You want a drink?" Consuelo offered.

"No," Timmons said roughly. He wanted to get on with it. He wanted to force her, although he knew that she had chosen him. In some way he felt that by violating Consuelo he would be getting back at Joshua for his insulting manner and words, for his refusal to even look at Timmons, for his forcing this payment in advance. If she would only fight him, put up at least a token resistance, it would be that much more important, that much more satisfying. The conviction rose in him that if he could best Consuelo he would have beaten the world. Everything would be easier afterward. The fear and frustration that had come to fill his life would be gone and he would have recaptured the power he had felt after the Olympic marathon.

Timmons reached out and pulled Consuelo toward him. He kissed her brutally, twisting her arms painfully.

“Hey!” Consuelo complained, pulling her head away. Timmons held on tighter and kissed her again, his teeth grating against hers. His arms slid down until he was holding her by the hips; he pulled her body fiercely in toward his, grinding against her as he held her absolutely still. Consuelo tried to push him away but he was too strong, too determined.

He finally lifted his head from hers. Her lips gleamed with his saliva.

“Where?” Timmons demanded. Consuelo mutely pointed toward the midships cabin. He led her inside, closing the door behind them; he pushed her down on the couch.

“Wait a minute,” Consuelo said breathlessly but Timmons ignored her. He pressed her backwards, lifting her skirt at the same time, tearing it back from her legs until it was bunched around her waist. She was wearing silk bikini underpants. He stripped them from her. He was gripping her, kneading her flesh brutally. Consuelo moaned. It sounded to Timmons that she was protesting helplessly against his handling of her and a pang of savage pleasure went through him. He took her with no further preliminaries, knowing by the bucking of her body and the small, stifled scream, that he was hurting her. She was unyielding at first: she had not been used for a long time and her body was out of practice. Timmons moved at his own pace, determined to take his own pleasure. Consuelo was gasping and Timmons took it as a sign of suffering, or, at least, sexual hysteria. Very soon Timmons almost forgot about her in his concentration on his own passion. But Consuelo tricked him. He had come to the point of being aware of nothing but his own feelings when suddenly she gripped him. Her legs grasped him around the waist, her hands grabbed at him, the nails digging into his buttocks. His concentration was broken. He held her tighter trying to force a return to his own rhythm but somehow she was stronger than he had imaged and was imposing her own movements on him. She used him then. He felt her shriek to a

finish once, twice, several more times, until he lost count. She would not allow him to establish his own cadence but shifted tempo on him each time he began to settle into sensation.

Timmons was raging now, the sweat streaming off his body, his hands tearing at her. Their coupling was not love-making: it was a battle. In his fury Timmons put both hands at Consuelo's throat and began to choke her. She struggled for a moment but he held on and he felt her body surrender, felt her softening into submission. She was holding him now, offering him complete freedom to use her as he wanted. He tore into her violently, the weight of his entire body behind every thrust. He was nearing his climax when Consuelo shifted from passivity to complicity, outrunning him once again in the race to pleasure. This time Timmons did not care. All that was important was the explosion, the shout and his nerve-jangled, shuddering body.

It took him longer than usual to return to normal. He lay panting against Consuelo's neck, his face buried in her hair. Once he opened his eyes to look at her and found that he was staring at finger-shaped bruises on her neck. He groaned and closed his eyes again, waiting for his heart and breathing to quiet.

Neither of them had heard the deck door open. It was only when a shadow cut across the wedge of moonlight slanting into the room that Timmons realized they were not alone. He looked up in sudden panic to see David Nash standing over them.

Timmons could not see the expression on David's face for the light was coming from behind him. He peered up at David, at a loss for something to say.

"You should have knocked," Timmons said at last. He was beginning to feel uneasy.

"You should have locked the door," David said coldly.

"Who is it?" Consuelo whispered.

"David Nash," came the answer. "Get dressed. Joshua's been taken to the hospital."

"Oh, God," Consuelo moaned and pushed at Timmons, trying to dislodge him. Timmons rolled away from her, excruciatingly aware how naked and vulnerable he was in the eyes of the other man, how puerile and awkward he must look when seen like this.

Consuelo was running through a door leading deeper into the boat. She was gone for several minutes. Timmons dressed himself. When she returned the only evidence of the past half hour was in the disorder of his hair.

Consuelo seemed to have forgotten the sex. She was agitated, her mind on Joshua. "Did you call an ambulance?" she asked.

"No," David answered. "Mallorey is driving him there. They must have reached the hospital by now."

"Did he ask for me?" Consuelo asked.

"He was pretty sick when we put him in the car, too sick to ask for anything." David's voice was even, low and removed. "I think you'd better get there."

"Will you take me?" Consuelo asked Timmons. She put her hand out to touch his arm and felt him flinch away from her.

"Uh, sure, if you don't have another way to get there," Timmons said reluctantly. She had bested him, outfoxed him in the sexual struggle but now it didn't mean a thing. It didn't count: her husband was sick, perhaps dying. It had been no contest at all.

"We can take my car," David offered. There was anger in his voice now. Timmons heard it and turned toward him. He wondered how long the other man had watched, how much he had seen. Timmons felt strange: he should have been uneasy about being looked at while making love, or whatever it was that they had done, but truthfully, he didn't care. Worse, he felt curiously satisfied at the idea that David Nash had watched him.

"Well, if Mr. Nash is going to take you," Timmons began but Consuelo stopped him before he could excuse himself. "I want you to come with me," she said. And then she smiled. It was a wolfish, snarling grin. She looked like an animal holding on to its prey and intent on playing with it for a while. "You come with me," Consuelo begged. "Both of you."

She wanted the two of them. David Nash was an unknown quantity but she had seen him looking at Malloreys, she had sensed there was a story there. If he was Malloreys's property she wanted him along, tending to her. Timmons had slaked her thirst but it was not enough. She wanted more of him. She would have to teach him how to take her. As it was, this first time, she had had to work too hard to bring him up to the edge of intensity that suited her. Joshua had been perfect from the beginning. He had helped her discover what it really was that she wanted in the way of sex. Before knowing Joshua she had always held herself aloof in bed, allowing herself a portion of pleasure without ever seeking the true limits of her own sensuality. She had never liked nor trusted those early partners enough to allow herself pure freedom in bed. Joshua had guessed what she needed. The first time he had pushed her across the line separating intensity from pain she had been appalled at her own response. But he had gentled her afterward, letting her know that anything she needed was permissible and that he could be trusted to guard her safety at the same time that he was bruising her flesh.

And then he had fallen ill and there had been no more reciprocity in bed. When he was able to, he had provided her with release, but it had no longer been the same. He had ceased to participate and she could not stand simply being serviced. Then even the servicing had ended. Joshua had not touched her in over a year.

"Let's go," David said harshly. They followed him to his car. He did not hold the door for Consuelo. This lack of gallantry told Timmons that David had seen it all, had stood there watching them rip each other apart.

Timmons was seated behind David. In the silence he could hear Consuelo mumbling something. He could not make out what she was saying.

David was speaking. "Stop that," he snapped. "You're disgusting. Your husband is having a heart attack or something and you're screwing your mind out with *him*."

"I didn't know he was sick," Consuelo said coolly, finding an excuse for her behavior. "And anyway, what does that have to do with it? Joshua let me go with him. You saw that."

"I don't know what I saw," David said hotly, trying to deny that the incident had happened.

"What do you care, anyway?" Consuelo asked. "Is it because Mallorey and Joshua. . . ." She stopped when she saw the reaction her words were causing.

David had gripped the steering wheel so hard that the car had swerved. He managed to right it, to bring it back under control.

"Don't change the subject," he said.

"I bet you wonder about it," Consuelo teased viciously. "I bet you'd like to know what he does with her." Consuelo was feeling satiated, free and invulnerable. She did not even stop to think what she was saying. "Or about the three of us. How about that? You want to know if the three of us. . . ."

David shoved his hand into her face, pushing her against the door. Her head smashed against the tempered glass of the window. She could feel the shock run clear through her. She was stunned, unable to say another word.

"Hey!" Timmons protested. It was not that he objected to David's hitting Consuelo, it was simply that the car was going so fast he was afraid David might lose control of it. Timmons was afraid of an accident. "Keep both hands on the wheel, would you?"

"You punk," David said quietly. "I'm going to have you blacklisted in the business. I know enough people that all I have to do is make a few telephone calls."

Timmons could not believe what he was hearing. "Why?" he begged. "What did I ever do to you? She's not your wife, is she? And Mr. Quick offered her to me, for God's sake! There's no reason you should get so. . . ."

"Shut up!" Consuelo shouted.

There was a tense silence in the car. Consuelo stared at the night, seeing her reflection in the side window. Mallorey had stuck around. She was with Joshua. Maybe he was dying. Maybe this was the end of that strange, unsettled life, sailing all over the world, leaving places on a whim, going elsewhere because Joshua suddenly decided that he hated the scenery or the food or the people. Now she would have to sit and watch him die. She didn't want him to die but if he had to die she wished him dead already. She could not bear the process of dying, and she hoped that Joshua would give her this one, last gift in payment for her life with him. She had done everything that was needed. She'd kept away from him when he wanted to be alone. She had needled and antagonized him out of his depressions. She had even allowed him the comfort of Mallorey under the guise of trying to learn how to behave like a *gringa*. She had helped him live the last part of his life, not just vegetate or slowly rot away. She thought of that prissy Mallorey, putting up with Joshua's self-indulgence so quietly, so diplomatically, so like a lady.

"That Mallorey," Consuelo said out loud. She glanced at David. He was eaten away by jealousy. She could smell it on him. He was another strange, prissy one. He and Mallorey would go well together, facing the world with pursed lips and cold eyes. What had Joshua seen in her, other than the red hair and the white, white skin? Consuelo had not asked him; she had simply accepted that at one time they had been lovers. Did Joshua hit Mallorey in bed? Those delicious, painful probings, the bruising hands: did he do that to Mallorey, too?

Consuelo was smiling. David saw the smile and thought

that he had never before seen such sensual ferocity. He had seen too much there in the cabin aboard *Moorea Cloud*. If Consuelo and Timmons could be that way, then Consuelo and Joshua must. . . . David shook his head, trying to clear it of images of Mallorey with Joshua. Worse, of the three of them.

"I'm obsessed," he whispered to himself, finally realizing what had been happening to him in these last weeks. The realization did not free him. Instead, it was as if he had suddenly given himself permission to live out his obsession to its logical end.

When they finally reached the hospital all sanity had disappeared. Consuelo was in a panic. The sight of Mallorey standing over Joshua filled her with dread. She thought, for a crazed moment, that Mallorey was some deadly angel come to pluck Joshua's soul from his body. Then Mallorey told her to go away and Consuelo did, relieved that she would not have to watch whatever was going to happen.

David saw Mallorey sitting next to Joshua, holding him tenderly, her hair gleaming copper above her pale, anguished face. She seemed so frightened, so vulnerable that his lust was aroused and he had to fight for control.

Timmons was appalled at the outcome of this evening. He was sure that David Nash would carry out his threat and get him blacklisted because of this one mistake. He did not question David's right to do such a thing, nor his ability to do it. The atmosphere in the emergency room did not help. Timmons had never been exposed to sickness. He had known only health and good spirits and cooperative flesh. The machines, the sounds, the smells undid him. He had not known that illness could so ravage a person that they could lie there, with no control, with no shame for their helplessness. All Joshua's personality, all his power and fame, were useless against the body's disintegration. He could not even remain conscious long enough to protest the indignities to

which he was subjected. In that short visit Timmons discovered hypochondria, the other side of his preoccupation with his body. As much as he had cared for himself, as much as he had tended to his body, he had never considered that it could betray him to the extent that Joshua's had. Timmons would never again be in tune with himself, would never again be able to listen to his body with the same acuity. Fearful now of what could go wrong, he would begin avoiding the contemplation of its inner workings and would, instead, become obsessed with its looks. He would take faddish vitamins and feel imaginary strains. He would take three showers a day and never again share food from the same utensils with anyone. He would exercise only to the point of first fatigue. The exercises he would choose would be for the benefit of his looks or would be socially useful. Timmons would take up tennis.

Three days later, when she learned that Joshua would live, Consuelo went to church for the first time since her childhood. The marina church was very modern, built of glass and wood and rock. It was named after St. Elmo, the patron saint of sailors, and the priest had his own small boat which he sailed during the week, dressing in jeans and a cut-off sweatshirt. Consuelo saw the priest leaving for the afternoon. She quickly lit a candle, crossed herself, genuflected and ran from the church. There was no mystery there, no presence to which she could give thanks. Her vague feelings of shame were exorcized. She spent the afternoon on board *Moorea Cloud*, in frenzied communion with Timmons Clarke.

VIII

Gigi left for work early. Her shift began at seven in the morning and she had had only two hours' sleep, as far as Dina could tell. Sam had become a frequent guest in Gigi's bed, if not in her heart, and Dina had been awakened more than once by the noise coming from the second bedroom. On the weekends, when Gigi was not working, she would spend all of her time on Sam's boat but it had somehow worked out that Sam was using his boat as an office and for weekend outings, and was almost living with the two women.

Dina had protested when she saw him moving in armloads of clothing. He was not paying any portion of the rent and Dina considered it unfair. Gigi, at last, had agreed with her and spoken to Sam about it.

"Why are you so hostile to me?" Sam had asked Dina. "I think we should confront the fact of your hostility and deal with it."

"Pay a third of the rent and I won't be hostile," Dina had retorted. "Is that confronting the issue enough for you?"

So Sam had removed his clothing from Gigi's closet, keeping only a change of jeans, a toothbrush and an electric razor.

This morning Dina came into the kitchen to find Sam sitting there, hunched over a cup of coffee, his eyes half open. He was staring morosely at the wall behind the refrigerator.

"You've got another crack," he said in guise of a greeting.

Dina looked. The wall behind the refrigerator had opened, exposing the studs behind the plasterboard.

"Good God," she said, "that wasn't there last night."

"When are you going to do something about it?" Sam asked. "You're so passive, Dina; you let people take advantage of you."

"Is there any coffee?" Dina asked, looking sideways at the cup he was holding.

"No, I just made some instant."

"Why don't you put up the coffee pot while I make a telephone call?" Dina asked.

Sam sat there, not responding to her suggestion. "I don't feel right about it," he said at last. "You've made me feel that this isn't my home, so I don't exactly want to contribute any of those household chores." He gazed at her sorrowfully. "I have to be honest about my feelings," he said as if honesty was a rare virtue.

Dina groaned inside herself. Trust Gigi to become involved with an idiot like Sam.

"Look," she said, "you sleep over here four nights a week. That makes you more or less part of the household, *de facto* if not *de jure*. That's legal talk. I can talk jargon too, friend. So why don't you get your *de facto* butt in gear and make us some coffee?"

Dina took the telephone and carried it into the living room. The long cord was snarled and she wasted some time untangling it. She looked up a number in her address book and then dialed.

"Peter?" Dina said when he answered the telephone. "There's another crack. It's big and it's wide and it makes a matched set in the kitchen. I've about had it."

"You ready to do the work that has to be done?" he asked, swinging into the conversation as if she had not just wakened him.

"Yes, I guess I'll have to."

"Okay, I'll see you at the office. By the way," he said, hesitating just for a moment, "I'm giving notice today."

"Oh," Dina said, suddenly feeling as if an important part of her life was coming to an end. With Peter in the office she had felt connected to the work and not just a servant to David Nash's demands. Peter had always found time to explain to her what was going on, and the meaning of the various investigations he was conducting. He had even allowed her to read law with him, explaining what he was looking for, trusting her intelligence and innate human deviousness to see possibilities in the synopses of law cases which were found in the law library. The law library was the second most important room in David Nash's office; Peter claimed that the most important room was David's toilet.

"What will I do without you?" Dina asked.

"Listen, you know you're going to be fired eventually," he said evenly. "So we'll be seeing a lot of each other when we work on the case. You'll be seeing more of me than you can stand."

"Well, since we're going to be partners in this enterprise," Dina laughed, "why don't you come to dinner tonight?"

"You could have asked me before this," Peter chided her, "and I'd love to. Listen, I'll probably be eating dinner with you a lot. I'm going to have to watch my money."

"You mean you don't have anything saved up? No cushion?" Dina was aghast.

"Cushion? What's a cushion?" he laughed.

"I'll see you at the office," Dina said grimly and hung up the telephone.

"Coffee's ready," Sam said sleepily. "I'm going back to bed."

"No, you're not," Dina cried. "I want you out of here. The place has to be cleaned up because I've got company for dinner."

Sam glared at her. "That's really inconsiderate," he complained. "You know today's Gigi's short shift. We've been looking forward to this night."

Dina shrugged. "You've been spending every night in," she retorted, "and I've kept out of your way. But now I need to use the apartment for business. You can just control yourself for one evening. Or go sleep on your boat; I don't care. But tonight the apartment's mine."

Sam looked very irritated. "You're completely selfish," he said. "You should really get some help to break you of that self-destructive, very unattractive pattern you're in." He shook his head as if he was contemplating an emotional basket case.

Dina ignored him. She had had to learn to ignore him for Sam had been trying to convince her that she was emotionally twisted ever since he had begun sleeping over. At first Dina had been exasperated with him and had mistakenly tried to answer his charges and insinuations. She had quickly understood that that was a losing tactic. Once Sam hooked you into conversation there was no shaking him loose. He would worry at his target, gnaw at it and bark out a series of definitions of Dina's behavior until she would give up in disgust. He had once managed to push her close to anxiety. It was then that she had determined never again to answer him, never again to give him an opening for that sort of discourse.

"Clean up or clear out," Dina said harshly. "I've got something important going on and it looks like there are going to be meetings here and a lot of people popping in and out at odd times. So make your plans accordingly."

She went back into the kitchen and poured herself a cup of the coffee that Sam had brewed. It was strong and harsh: he had used too many coffee beans ground too fine.

Dina poured some of the coffee back into the pot and filled her cup with light cream. She then began rummaging through the refrigerator for something to eat. Her breakfast, when it

was ready, was a gourmet's nightmare. She had heated two tortillas and filled them with scrambled eggs, diced American cheese, shredded lettuce and hot chili peppers.

"God, that looks awful," Sam said, strolling into the kitchen fully dressed. He had not shaved.

"Tastes good, though," Dina said, her mouth burning with the heat of the chili peppers. She was panting from the sting.

"Self-destructive tendencies, I keep telling you," Sam said peevishly.

"Get the hell out of here," Dina shouted. "I'm sick of listening to you."

She brushed past him and went into the bathroom. Sam had gargled and washed his unshaved face. As usual he had sprayed water all over the small room. Cold, soap-flecked puddles lay on the tile floor, on the formica vanity, on the sides of the sink.

"Good God!" Dina shouted, pushed past all endurance. "Don't you ever clean up after yourself?" She burst out of the bathroom to confront him. "Get in there and mop up your mess!" she cried. "I'm not your damn maid!"

"You're over-reacting," he chided her.

"I'm going to over-react you right out of this apartment," Dina said brutally. "I'll arrange it so that Gigi spends all her time on your boat. Do you hear what I'm saying, Sam?"

"You resent me," Sam said good-naturedly. "I've taken your roommate's attention away from you and you're jealous. There's a certain homosexual strain in your make-up, you know."

"God, you're dumb," Dina said softly.

"You resent my sensitivity and professional acumen. I know you better than you want to be known."

Dina could feel the anger building up in her, looking for an outlet through which to explode. She wanted to shatter Sam's deadly self-assurance.

"Maybe you're also resentful and jealous because your friend is getting good loving and you're not getting any," he said with appalling equanimity.

"Good loving?" Dina said calmly. "You think Gigi hasn't told me all about it?" She managed a short laugh and was gratified to see Sam turn shifty and insecure.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You know exactly what I mean."

Gigi had never spoken to her in detail about Sam's habits. Like most women she was fairly discreet about the particulars of love-making, gossiping only when she had been hurt or when the man was a thoroughly unsatisfying lover. If the sex was good she never spoke about it. Sam the Shrink should have known that. He should have been aware of the way women talked about their sexual experiences. Evidently he did not know. Even more evidently he was not that sure of himself as a lover.

So much for his professional acumen, Dina thought.

"What did she tell you?" he asked, trying to hide his uneasiness behind a bland tone.

Dina shrugged. "You know," she said with devastating vagueness. She turned and went back to the bathroom, closing the door behind her and locking it. Once, in the beginning, when Sam had begun spending nights with Gigi, he had walked in on her while she was in the bathtub and had been theatrically amazed and uncomprehending of her angry reaction.

"It's only skin," he had said with malicious innocence. "I don't know why're you're getting so upset. You're really got a problem about your body, don't you?"

Ever since then Dina had locked the bathroom door, feeling that somehow she was being forced to barricade herself within her own apartment, that she was losing the freedom to relax in her own home. Dina wondered if he played the same games with Gigi. If he did then there was something profoundly wrong with her friend to allow such behavior.

Sam pounded on the bathroom door. "I'm leaving," he said.

"Goodby," Dina answered, knowing the moment she spoke that it had been a mistake to answer him.

"You don't have to be so unfriendly," Sam said. "Listen, Dina, I know a really good shrink, if you don't want to work with me. I'll leave his name and number in the kitchen."

She heard his footsteps receding and then, a while later, the sound of the front door closing. Only then did she relax enough to run the shower. She was combing her hair when she realized that she had not unlocked the bathroom door. She so mistrusted Sam that she could not be sure he had really gone. Perhaps he was sitting in the living room, just waiting for her to come out. She looked with stricken eyes at her own reflection in the mirror. "I don't even feel safe in my own home anymore," she said.

Peter used Dina's typewriter to draft his letter of resignation. Then he grinned wryly at her, folded the paper and put it in an envelope.

"You're sure you want to do this?" Dina said sadly.

"Yeah, I guess. It couldn't have lasted much longer the way it's been going. David's been pushing me, you know, giving me scut work and telling me that it's not good enough, that I missed something or that I didn't understand all the nuances. It's been going on for six weeks now." Peter shook his head. "He wants me to resign and he doesn't have the guts to fire me."

Dina thought about it for a moment. "You know," she said slowly, "nobody has ever been fired. I mean, not that I know of, not since I've been here. People have just quit."

Peter nodded. "I can believe it. He humiliates you until you have to leave. Saves him severance pay, too." Peter smiled broadly. "Quite an education, Deen. I learned how *not* to deal with people." He waved the envelope at her. "Put this on his desk for me, would you?"

"Okay," Dina said. She glanced at him. "You don't want to do it yourself?"

"I want to avoid polemics and fatherly advice. Listen, I'll see you tonight."

Peter went back to his office and began to clean out his desk. He had given a month's notice but he knew that David would want him to leave immediately. David Nash would not want someone around whose loyalty he could not count on. He would take it for granted that Peter was an enemy. David trusted nobody's sense of honor. Perhaps he had been disappointed in the past, or perhaps it was a lesson he had learned in law school along with the technique of drawing up contracts, or perhaps it was a principle he practiced. Perhaps he simply had no honor himself and therefore could not contemplate the existence of honor in others.

"Well, it's not exactly full-house honorable, what I'm about to do," Peter mused. "I should have quit the moment I thought about going into a suit against the marina. Instead, I stuck around and kept on gathering information about the corporations. Not very honorable, indeed," Peter thought wryly. "David Nash taught me some lessons after all."

His telephone buzzed. Knowing who it was he picked up the receiver. "Yes, David," he said.

"Peter, there's no reason you have to give us a month of your time when I'm sure you have other plans that you're eager to begin working on." David Nash's voice was matter-of-fact and neutral. "It was good of you to give a full month's notice but we won't hold you to it. You can leave at once, if you like."

Peter knew that it was an order. "Very good of you, David," he responded. "Very generous."

"I can't tell you how happy we have been to have you for a collaborator," David said smoothly. "You've contributed so much to the firm's success." He sounded as if he was repeating a rehearsed speech. This was evidently his farewell address to departing employees. "I want you to know,"

David continued, "that we're always here if you need us. And I'd like to hear from you from time to time, just to know how you're getting on."

"You'll hear from me, David," Peter said brusquely. "You know you will."

"Ah, yes, I see." Peter had broken the flow of David's words. "Well, uh, take it easy," David said lamely and broke the connection.

Peter shook his head. "He didn't want to shake my hand," he thought. "Now why did I have to give him even that much information? Before, he wasn't completely sure that I was going to take on the marina. Now he knows. He'll be prepared. Hell, the one lesson I should have learned from him I didn't: keep your mouth shut."

Peter cleaned the last of his belongings out of the bottom desk drawer. He checked the closet and the credenza. He had taken everything of importance.

"Well," he said to Dina, "I'll see you tonight."

"You said that," Dina answered him. "You feeling squirmy about this?"

Peter shook his head. "I think you'd like to know," he grinned at her, "I'm moving into the marina."

"What? Are you crazy?"

"No. I'm going to join the class action suit. It'll look better, you know. Poor, powerless little residents against the big, bad corporation."

Dina smiled. "You're incorrigible. And what's David going to do without you?"

"Oh, he'll survive very well," Peter reassured her. "Don't you worry about him."

"Get out of here," Dina said. "I have work to do before the ax falls."

She watched Peter leave, taking in the scuffed cowboy boots, the wrinkled chino trousers, the yellow and green bowling shirt which read "AAACme Transmissions, Palmyra, Pa." in shredded felt letters across the back. She felt

almost tender toward him, knowing how caring and gentle he had been with her so that at times she had felt like his partner in work rather than an employee. She also knew how unrelentingly ruthless he could be in his use of the law.

“Dina, come in, would you?” David Nash was standing in the doorway, beckoning to her. Dina picked up the steno pad and a pen and went into his office. She sat down in the chair she always used when taking dictation.

“No, no, you won’t need that,” David said. He looked grim, his mouth thin with tension. “Are you going ahead with that class action suit against us?” David asked.

“I don’t know,” Dina said, hoping to forestall what she knew was coming. “It’s something I have to look into.”

David nodded wearily. “Well, I’m sorry but I’m going to have to let you go,” he said.

“I was expecting that,” Dina said. “It’s a lot easier to fire me than to see to it that the buildings are repaired.”

“That is not the point,” David said quickly. “It’s just not possible to have the plaintiff in a case working for the defendant. It would give you an unfair advantage.”

“David,” Dina said patiently, although she was outraged at his bad faith, “there have been lots of cases in which plaintiff has worked for defendant and the defendants have been enjoined from firing the plaintiffs. That argument could be fought as a side issue, if you insist on it.”

“Dina, I wish you could look at my position more fairly,” David said. “It’s not equitable, you working here, with access to information of a private nature.”

His argument was an affront to her intelligence. Did he think she could work as a legal secretary and not know how court cases were researched, how both sides had to deliver information to each other that they were going to present in court? As she looked at his blank face, the face he used when dealing with an adversary, she began to lose the feeling of intimidation that his presence aroused in her.

David waited for her to respond. Dina remembered what she had overheard him say to Peter so many times: "Keep your mouth shut. You'll learn more that way." She continued looking at David, knowing that she was frowning, hoping that he would take her expression for confusion. It would not do for him to know that she knew what she was about. It would be much better if David continued thinking of her as just a secretary, a piece of the furniture, someone whom one could avoid noticing.

"You'll lose," David warned her. "You have absolutely no idea of what is involved."

"The buildings are in bad repair," Dina said patiently. "King's Rest will not or cannot fix them. It's very simple." It was a bald re-statement of her position. She would give him nothing more.

David shook his head vehemently. He was arguing with her now as if she was a stubborn child. "There's more involved," he began and then stopped, years of training overcoming his desire to convince her.

Dina waited, hoping that he would continue. What more was involved?

"That will be all," David said. "You will not expect severance pay, I assume."

"You assume wrong," Dina said hotly. "You're firing me; you owe me severance in lieu of notice. I'm taking it for granted that you will give me a good recommendation since you're not firing me for cause."

David had a pinched look about his mouth. "Draw yourself two weeks' salary. You may refer prospective employers to me: I will not hurt your chances for another job."

"Thank you," Dina said, rising from the chair which had become so familiar to her. From this chair she had listened to David dictating, had come to know the sound of his voice when he was troubled or preoccupied. She had learned everything about him that she could: the expressions on the face

that others thought so rigid and uncommunicative, the way he used his hands when he was under pressure, the look around his eyes when he was planning an intricate, finely balanced maneuver. She had hoped to use her knowledge of him in love's interest. Now it seemed she would be using it in war.

She left the office immediately knowing that if she stayed any longer she would dissolve into tears. She could not afford that self-indulgence, she could not permit herself to be hurt or depressed or maudlin. She had to find a job and she must keep her wits sharp. Tonight she and Peter would begin planning the battle against King's Rest and she would need all her energy, all her strength for what was to come.

David buzzed Dina. When she did not answer he walked out of his office, expecting to see her seated at her desk. He saw that she was gone. The files on which she had been working were piled neatly in the center of the plasticized rosewood desk.

There were other girls working in the office but he hesitated to call on them. They had enough to do, taking care of the two other lawyers who rented space from him. He would have to hire someone. That meant that he would have to put an advertisement in the newspaper. For a moment it seemed as if life was terribly complicated, that he was besieged by a thousand details of whose existence he had not been aware. Dina had taken care of all that, had kept him free to do the main work of this business. He grinned mirthlessly as he realized how he had taken for granted his freedom from detail.

"No way around it," he said to himself, "I'll have to hire someone right away." He looked around her desk. There, next to the telephone was the Rolladex. "At least she didn't take all the phone numbers with her," he joked to himself.

David did not know that Dina's bedroom closet held a file cabinet. In the drawers of that file cabinet were duplicates of

every scrap of paper, every name and address having something to do with King's Rest. Dina had been preparing for this day for a long time. Those duplicates, those copies, those lists were her insurance.

The Department of Small Craft Harbors had an office in Marina del Rey. The staff there sympathized with Dina but King's Rest was not in their jurisdiction. One of the men suggested that Dina try the Coastal Zone Conservation Commission.

The Coastal Zone Conservation Commission had been formed only recently. King's Rest had been built long before they came into existence. They could, of course, open an investigation if Dina could prove to them that King's Rest was threatening the environment, destroying beaches or polluting the water. The Commission had no evidence to show that any beach conservation laws had been broken.

"What if we tested the ground under Newport Mews and found that the development was built on a fault?" Dina suggested.

Dinner was long over. Peter was sitting on the floor, leaning against the couch with his legs spread out in front of him.

"It would help," Peter agreed, "but geological surveys are expensive. We have to organize the tenants here before we can start collecting money."

"Maybe there are some records in Sacramento?" Dina suggested. In the last few days she had come to realize how shy she was, from the reluctance she felt at the idea of knocking on strange doors.

"Could be," Peter said. "I know someone up there. I'll ask him to do a search for us."

"I know a geologist," Dina said slowly. She was sorry the moment she said it: she had not telephoned Kirk after that evening.

"Use him," Peter ordered. "We're going to have to use anything and anybody we know in order to pull this off."

Dina was peering at the table, at a series of Polaroid photographs. She had spent the afternoon taking pictures of every crack in the apartment. Now she picked up a marking pen and began writing captions on each snapshot, identifying the location of every crack.

"How's your apartment?" Dina asked as she labelled the last one.

"Dumb and impersonal," Peter answered. "Viking Village is amazing. A third of the tenants move out each month. Can you imagine that happening anywhere else in the world? The guy who lived in the apartment I moved into left so much food in the refrigerator that it looks like a silver mine. And it's frozen solid. I pulled the plug and it'll probably be leaking green crap by tomorrow morning."

Peter made a face. He reached into his pocket and took out some cigarette papers and a small tin of marijuana.

"Do you mind?" he asked Dina.

"No, but not for me. I don't do that anymore."

"Oh? Why not?" He began rolling a joint.

"I went through that number and then at some point it just stopped being wonderful. You know what I mean?"

Peter lit the joint. "My walls," he said, holding his breath, "are perfect sound conductors. I feel like I'm participating in everything that goes on next door. One of the girls there is a moaner. She says 'Oh, God' a lot."

Dina shook her head in dismay. "I told you I thought it was a bad idea." She watched him puffing at the joint and then said: "Blow some of that my way."

He smiled and did as she asked. She inhaled the familiar odor and then began waving her hand in the air, trying to disperse the small white cloud of smoke. "The thrill is gone," she laughed.

Peter smoked quickly. He was using the marijuana, as most marina people did, like alcohol. He did not look for

communal warmth or childish ritual. All he wanted was the relaxation and the feeling of heightened awareness that marijuana brought. When the cigarette was down to a nub he flicked the glowing coal into an ashtray and swallowed the quarter-inch length of ragged stub that was left. Dina could see no change in him, no lessening of attention. Only his speech was different, the words coming more deliberately.

“There’s a party at the pool, tonight,” Peter said. “Three girls knocked on my door to look me over and invite me to it.” He grinned. “It looks like Viking Village is as loose as the entire marina’s supposed to be.”

“Not here,” Dina said dryly. “Here in the Mews I don’t think I know three people to say more than hello to. Everyone sort of keeps to themselves. You see them around and you nod to each other but nobody dares to intrude on anybody. I wonder how many people are just waiting for someone to talk to them?”

“You’ll find out soon enough,” Peter said encouragingly. “Organizing puts you in touch with the rough of it very, very quickly.”

The sound of a key in the front door lock startled them. The door opened and Gigi came in, followed by Sam. She was looking pale, as if she was under a strain.

“What’s going on?” Sam asked, seeing the photographs on the table.

Peter explained.

“So you’re the lawyer,” Sam said with a shrewd expression.

“Yeah.”

“Don’t you think you’re over-reaching yourself, trying to take on a corporation that big?” It sounded like an accusation.

“No,” Peter said.

Dina looked at Sam in exasperation. The man presumed too much.

“Listen, guy,” Sam went on, “haven’t you ever won-

dered what your motivations are for tilting at windmills?"'

Peter did not respond to the provocation. Sam was waiting for a reaction, a denial, an explanation. He looked extremely satisfied with himself, sure that he would be able to dominate the conversation.

Peter refused the challenge. Instead he got up and said, "If you tell me where the stuff is, I'll make us all some coffee."

Dina saw Sam's lips press together in irritation. He had been finessed in his own game.

"Coffee's in the cupboard directly above the stove," she said. "You can't miss it."

Sam sat down on the couch, spreading his arms and legs to encompass as much of it as he could. It looked like he was annexing a territory.

Gigi had followed the exchange with amusement. "Comfortable?" she asked Sam.

"Sure am," he said jovially. "Come here, baby." He was patting the seat invitingly.

Gigi shook her head. "You're something else, Sam. And I'm getting damn sick of you coming on with all that stupid shrink talk, getting in your little jabs and pretending that you aren't picking a fight."

"Do you feel threatened by me?" Sam asked with practiced seriousness. Dina suddenly saw him as a robot, reacting automatically to stimuli rather than conversing with friends.

The sound of the coffee grinder could be heard coming from the kitchen. "He's trying to stake a claim," Sam said solemnly.

"You're incorrigible," Dina replied. "When you attack someone it's never your fault if they're disturbed by it. It's always something wrong with them."

Sam wagged his head in admiration. "Best defense is an attack, right?"

"You said it; I didn't," Dina commented.

"I don't need to be the target of someone's unbridled

hostility," Sam said self-righteously. He got up from the couch. "I'll come back another time, when you're not so determined to act out whatever it is that's bothering you." He held a hand out to Gigi. "Come on, baby," he said.

"Sam, you gross me out," Gigi replied, staying where she was.

"Where'd you get that?" Dina asked.

"A kid in pediatrics," Gigi giggled. "He's been saying it to everyone. Can't blame him. We're always coming at him with syringes and abrading scalpels or something else unpleasant."

"What are you doing in pediatrics?" Dina asked.

"I couldn't take the I.C.U. anymore. I took a temporary transfer. The pay's less, but my soul will be better for it." Gigi had been chortling as she talked about her pain.

"Are you aware how inappropriate your way of talking is?" Sam attacked. "You've just told us a terrible story and you were laughing all through it."

"Are you aware what a pain in the ass you are?" Gigi twittered. "I really wish you'd leave."

"Fine," Sam said. "But you really ought to get some professional help." He was dawdling near the door, swinging it back and forth as he leaned on the doorknob with all his weight.

"Watch it," Dina warned him, "you're going to break the hinges."

"You're so materialistic you can't even see the spiritual poverty around you," Sam said. "I feel sorry for you."

"Goodby, Sam," Gigi said with finality. She pushed him out the door and slammed it shut behind him. Then she turned back into the room and threw herself on the couch. "God, I feel a thousand pounds lighter," she squealed.

"Why did it take you so long?" Dina wondered.

"Oh, the screwing I was getting was worth the screwing I got, but he really is a bore."

"Who's a bore?" Peter asked, coming into the room with the coffeepot and some cups on a tray.

"Sam. Gigi just threw him out." Dina stirred some cream into her coffee.

"That fellow has problems," Peter said seriously. "He ought to get some professional help."

Dina burst out laughing. She found herself, a few minutes later, seated on the floor while laugh tears streamed down her face.

"What're you on?" Gigi asked suspiciously.

"She's contact high," Peter said. "I smoked one joint but she didn't touch it."

"Listen, calm down, Deen," Gigi said worriedly.

They drank the coffee and chattered softly about unimportant things, waiting for Dina to regain control of herself. Finally she was calmed enough to suggest that they get down to business. This gentle play was pleasant but unproductive.

"Let's get to it," Peter said. "Dina, what are you going to do for money?"

"Oh, I signed up with a temporary office-help agency," she said, "that'll give me some free time to spend on our project."

Gigi looked solemn. "I'd hoped it wouldn't have to go to court."

"So did I," Dina told her, "but nothing's happened, they've made no attempt to fix up the place."

"And there's no guarantee that it will ever get to court," Peter informed them. "We're just beginning and we're a long way from that."

"I'll help," Gigi said. "Now that I've shifted assignments I won't be so tired and crazy all the time."

"The first thing is," Peter said, "how many people do you know living in the Mews?"

"I know four or five guys," Gigi offered.

"Okay. It'll be your job to get hold of them. The best

approach is to ask them how they like their apartments. Let them tell you what's wrong; let them get good and angry and then make your pitch. We want to have a core group of five to eight people besides ourselves. It shouldn't take you more than a week to sign them up. The way it works is this core group begins to feel very exclusive, like they're the founding fathers. They recruit other people into what they come to think of as *their* program."

"Sneaky," Dina said admiringly.

"No, not really," Peter said. "It's more or less how these things work. I've done a slew of them and it always turned out that way."

"What's the biggest thing you ever handled?" Gigi asked.

"A community suit against Los Angeles County."

"Did you win?" Gigi prodded him.

"It depends how you look at it," Peter mused. "We lost the case in court. Then I announced that we were going to appeal. In the meantime the County came around and did what we had wanted in the first place so it never went farther than that. So, you see, we lost it on paper, but we won it in the real world."

"I'd settle for that," Dina said grimly.

"Listen," Peter said quickly, "you don't realize what's involved. You're going to be hassled. You might even be threatened. It's sure that they'll try to evict you, unless David can convince them not to. You're going to have to be very tough and determined and not have too much conscience while this thing is happening. Like when someone you recruit comes to you and cries about how the locks on their door were changed or how they received an eviction notice and it's your fault. You're going to have to convince that person to hang in. You're going to have to keep your head clear and know how to respond to every provocation and attack. It's probably going to be very hairy."

"They can evict us?" Gigi asked in alarm.

"They can *try*," David repeated. "If you allow yourself to be intimidated then you're in trouble. I'll be here to help, don't forget that. See, for every move they make there's a counter-move. Just stay calm and don't do anything on the spur of the moment or without consulting me first."

"Okay," Gigi said slowly. She no longer seemed too sure about the undertaking.

"Dina?" Peter asked.

"I want to jump ahead," Dina said. "If we're going to be under siege I want as much ammunition as I can get. I'm going to try to get hold of that geologist."

"Fine," Peter approved, "but remember that we're operating with no funds right now. Don't get us so deep in debt that we have to pay out everything we get through contributions. That's another thing we should decide: do we ask for contributions or do we assess each member of the core group a set amount? There's something to be said for both methods."

"I feel like Mata Hari," Gigi said.

"She got shot," Dina said sharply. "This isn't a movie, Gigi. It's not glamorous and it's no game."

Peter nodded his agreement. "There's going to be a lot of hard work and you'll be discouraged more often than not."

"It's fine by me," Gigi said blithely. She jumped up. "I guess I'd better go knock on some doors."

"Me, too," Dina said, rising from the couch. "I'll call Kirk to see if he's at home. Oh, damn!" She suddenly remembered where Kirk lived. "His boat's right next to Sam's!"

"Sam won't be home," Gigi said, unconcerned. "He'll be bar-hopping, telling some dumb girl how mixed up she is."

"Look who's talking," Dina muttered.

"Don't be hostile," Gigi said and then covered her mouth with both hands. "It's catching," she said, the words muffled.

"Go knock on doors," Peter said. "It'll soon knock the nonsense out of you."

Gigi wrinkled her nose at him charmingly and tripped out of the apartment, looking not like a conspirator or strike organizer but more like a hostess planning her guest list for a party.

"Yeah," Kirk said and "yeah" again as he looked at the cracked walls. He whistled softly to himself as he inspected a carpenter's level placed on the kitchen floor.

"You see?" Dina asked him.

"Yeah," he repeated.

"What do you think?" Peter demanded, impatient with Dina's soft approach. She had been leading them from apartment to apartment, gaining entrance with gentle insistence at each door, Kirk trailing after her as they discovered the extent of the damage in room after room.

"Well," Kirk said slowly, "it depends how far it extends."

"What do you mean?"

"Does it go the full length of the building and beyond or through the width of the building? And how about the buildings across the road? You have to find out the extent of the anomaly. Maybe it goes all the way to the end of the Mews."

It was early evening and the sun was boiling down into the ocean, looking as if it might heat the water to steam in its furious, shimmering descent.

"Let's go back to my place," Dina suggested. "We can have a drink and talk about it." She looked sternly at Peter, warning him not to hurry Kirk. She had told him that Kirk had not been eager to get involved in the problem, wanting only to shut himself away on his boat, to use the marina as an escape from the stress of his job.

Peter subsided, curbing his impatience in deference to

Dina's prior claim on Kirk. She had found him, she had brought him into this, she would handle him.

With apologies for their intrusion and repeated thanks for the apartment resident's patience, they left, walking slowly through the artificial curving paths which had been cut through the development. At this time of the day, just before the lights came on and shed their yellowish glare over the Mews, the terraces were filled with the sound of music and voices, the clashing of ice cubes and glasses, the scraping of shoe heels against cement. Conversations were punctuated with the aluminum slide and smack of patio doors being opened and closed. Sentences rang out, clear in the air and then muffled as the speakers stepped inside for a moment.

"You notice something?" Kirk said suddenly. "There are no dogs barking."

"No animals allowed in the development," Peter said. He listened, his head tilted to one side as if the silence was whispering something in confidence. "Sounds inhuman without animals or kids," he commented.

"Let's go inside," Dina said hurriedly. She had shivered even though the air was not yet chill.

As they walked toward her apartment Dina saw the corridor in a new way. "Have you noticed," she asked, "all the hallways are the same. Plaid rugs and textured walls. I guess it's supposed to look sophisticated but something's wrong. It's almost like. . ." she hesitated, unable to formulate the feeling into words.

"Like a motel," Peter said readily. "Like an expensive motel beginning to go to seed. You know, it was planned that way. The interior designers had a color psychologist work out the right shades and textures that would make people move after a while. It grabs you when you first see it but it doesn't take long to make you feel itchy."

Dina opened her apartment door and they walked in silently. A great desolation had settled in her heart. The apartment had been a home for her. She had felt comfortable here,

comfortable enough to appreciate the rooms, the view, to feel safe in her bedroom, to take solace in the familiarity of the kitchen.

The two men sat down while Dina remained standing in the center of the large room. She felt anxious: she realized that she would have to move.

"Well?" she said suddenly, turning to Kirk, abandoning the gentle, protective attitude she had used while conducting him on the tour.

He shrugged. "I can't help you," he said. "You need a soils engineer."

"But you're a geologist," Dina protested.

"Listen, if you want me to tell you how the Andes were formed, I will. Or if you want to know about Sylmar and the San Andreas Fault, hell, I'm your man. But this is different."

"Where. . ." Peter began but Dina interrupted him. "Do you know someone?" she asked. "We don't even know how to *begin* doing this."

Peter grinned at her apparent helplessness and sat back on the couch. "How about a drink, Deen?" he asked.

"Sure. Help yourself. How about you, Kirk?"

"Huh? Oh, okay, uh, a gin and tonic."

Peter rose and went into the kitchen.

"Do you know a soils engineer?" Dina insisted.

"Well, I guess," Kirk responded reluctantly. "It'll cost, though."

"We don't have that much money. There's only ten of us and our jobs just about pay our expenses."

Kirk stared at the opposite wall, his eyes running back and forth over a crack that was reopening under a patch. Then he said, "You really want to get me in on this, don't you?"

"If you feel you want to join us." Dina's voice was pious, as if she was part of a religious movement and was trying her best not to proselytize too obviously.

Kirk took a tall gin and tonic from Peter who had come

back into the room just in time to hear Dina's last remark. He tried to keep a straight face as he sat down on the couch again.

"There's going to be trouble," Kirk said, directing himself to Peter.

"Yes," Peter said. Dina began to protest but Peter stopped her. "Be fair," he chided her. "He deserves the truth."

"Listen," Kirk said anxiously, "they could bounce me from my slip. Do you know what it's like in Southern California, trying to find a slip? They can't be had."

"If they evict you, we'll fight them," Peter promised.

"No, I can't chance it."

"What if we hired you? That would be legitimate," Dina suggested.

"No."

"Then find us someone," Peter said shortly.

Kirk shrugged. "I'll try to come up with something."

"You don't want to be involved in this at all," Dina said. "We understand. But this has got to be done and we really could use your help."

"Okay," Kirk said, sighing. "I'll give you the name of a guy I know, but you can only use my name as an introduction. You have to make it clear that I'm not part of it."

"Agreed," Peter said quickly.

"I'm going to send you to a guy who's had a rough time of it lately."

Peter pursed his lips. He would have preferred an engineer who was presently employed, someone with a good reputation.

"The kid's good," Kirk said, writing a telephone number on a piece of paper, "and he has access to a lab. He can do the job."

Kirk handed the paper to Dina. She read it. "Takashima?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"This number's in the Marina," Dina said dubiously.

Kirk smiled for the first time, as if knowing what her

reaction would be. "He's playing at the Star and Garter."

"Oh, my Lord," Peter said in exasperation. "A musician?" He began to say something else but the words stopped before he uttered them. Past experience took over. He said: "We'll check him out."

Dina looked confused.

"Listen," Peter said, "you never know what you're going to find or how people can help you. You have to go along with the craziest ideas because in this business serendipity is a big factor. Especially when you don't have cash."

"You coming with us, Kirk?" Dina asked.

He rose, shaking his head. "You're on your own. I don't know you, you don't know me, I never heard of Newport Mews."

"Thanks," Peter said sarcastically. Then he revised himself. "No, really: thank you."

"Will I see you soon?" Kirk dared, pretending to ignore any claim Peter might have on Dina.

"Soon," she said, "once this thing is in motion."

Kirk left, smiling blankly at Peter, shifting his eyes nervously away from Dina as she showed him out.

"I feel crazy," Dina said when she came back to Peter. "As if things are blowing apart slowly and I'm watching the pieces float in the air and the space between them is growing, growing."

"Don't go freaky on me," Peter said. He came to her and held her, pressing her gently against his body. He kissed her cheek. "It's going to be interesting, all of it," he assured her.

"Are we going to have a thing?" Dina asked him. She had put her hands on his shoulders and was looking up at him. Her expression was not tender. She asked the question in the manner of someone seeking information.

Peter put his hands on her face. His touch was tender and unaggressive. He touched her as one friend gives comfort to another.

"I don't know," he said. "Maybe. There's this thing we

have to do together.'" He hesitated. "'There's plenty of time.'" He kissed her cheek again and then his lips touched hers for a moment. He seemed to be listening to something deep within himself. He smiled. "'Hell, yes, of course we're going to have a thing.'" He laughed and drew her deeper into an embrace, not yet attempting to turn the affection to sensuality.

She knew that he was waiting for her to be ready, that he would not make a sexual move toward her until she was willing to respond. She gently removed herself from his arms, caressing his hands reassuringly with her fingers as she stepped away from him. She was thankful to Peter for hearing her mood, for being free enough to allow her to hesitate without showing any impatience.

"About David," she said.

"You don't have to say anything," Peter told her. "I know how you felt."

"Do you think I'm through dreaming of him?" Dina asked wistfully. She missed the dreaming more than David himself.

Peter grinned at her. "If you're lucky, Deen, he's your last movie star."

She laughed. "Don't you have a dream girl?" she teased. "'Mallorey?'"

Peter shook his head. "I wanted to meet her to find out who she was," he said. "There were no preconceptions so there were no dreams."

"Nine o'clock," Dina said abruptly, turning away from him. His sensitivity was frightening: he knew too much, for a man.

The Star and Garter was another theme restaurant in the marina. It had been designed by someone suffering from Anglophilia. The menu was simple: the Star and Garter sold nothing but chicken, roast beef and lobster. It served beer and

wine in tankards and the menu was burned into wooden slates.

The bartenders wore vinyl smithy's aprons and pirate shirts with great, belled sleeves that got in the way. The waitresses wore mob caps, ferociously low-cut bodices and laced waist cinchers. Their breasts were overly-exposed and seemed to threaten escape under the force of the corseting. Each young woman had smears of blusher on her face in an attempt to turn her into a rosy-cheeked serving wench. The effect was spoiled by the unvaried repetition of the costuming and by the girls' determined efficiency.

The restaurant interior boasted rafters unnecessary to hold up the wall-borne roof, fireplaces in which nothing ever burned and uncomfortable captain's chairs. The lights were kept low and electric candles graced each table.

It was a large room and was never over-heated, not by food, nor bodies, nor merriment. The far end of the room was taken up by a small stage. The rafter facing it was loaded with lighting equipment.

Peter and Dina arrived in time for the second change-over in clientele. They were forced to sit at the bar where, by turning sideways, they could see the stage. There were serious drinkers around them and the third wave of diners was taking its place. There was a feverish exchange of table settings as young men dressed like stable-boys swabbed the wood-grained formica. Wenches rushed back and forth taking drink orders, patiently recording the diners' choices and serving meals.

Peter and Dina ordered a second drink. They did not speak to each other, Dina remaining silent from nervousness while Peter watched her surreptitiously as he sipped at his glass.

“Ladies and Gentlemen!” a voice said over the loudspeaker system. “The Star and Garter is happy to present Candy, Leslie and Kelly. The Takashima Sisters!”

Music broke out like a plague, the lights dimmed even

further and spotlights turned the dais into a legitimate stage. The Star and Garter had Las Vegas pretensions: the eating customers were the opening act.

Three Nisei girls of indeterminate age bounded on stage and began to sing and posture stiltedly, moving their arms and legs in unison. What they were doing was to the dance as whoring is to love: an imitation which fools nobody but which must suffice when the real thing is not available.

Dina bent toward Peter, talking loudly in his ear. Nothing could be heard over the shrill, unmusical voices of the trio and the unwavering beat of their back-up band.

“I’m hallucinating,” she said.

The three Ginza faces were doing a medley of World War Two songs and had reached the apogee of the set. They were singing “Remember Pearl Harbor” joyously, in disco rhythm. Behind them, the band was sweating at its task.

There were four musicians. Two of them were playing electric guitar, fussing busily with the controls. Both guitarists were tall, long-muscled and blond. They looked like college sophmores majoring in swimming and rock.

The drummer was of Mediterranean descent. He was a traditionalist, looking bored and chewing gum as his arms travelled frenziedly back and forth.

The fourth musician was Nisei. He was playing an electric keyboard instrument that was almost hidden behind tangled cords. It looked as if he was sitting at a telephone switchboard, plugging and unplugging wires with one hand and pianoing with the other.

“I’m going to laugh,” Dina warned Peter. “I’m going to make a fool of myself.”

The Takashima sisters had slowed their pace. They gathered together at the center of the stage as the lighting changed to an ashy lilac, turning their bright skins muddy. They began to croon “I’ll Be Seeing You,” managing to sound vaguely like the Andrews Sisters.

"It's nostalgia," Peter told Dina. "Their parents were held in detention camps and they feel they missed out on something."

Dina could see his face: he looked ill.

"God!" Peter said passionately. It was a curse. "Isn't this a son of a bitch," Peter said into Dina's hair.

In these surroundings, in the face of the grotesque act taking place on stage, Dina suddenly found herself concentrating on the small puffs of warm breath that accompanied Peter's words. She felt her hair stir in response and became aware of the nearness of his body. She looked up at him and their eyes met. The pupils of Dina's eyes were dilated so fully that only the smallest outline of the iris was visible.

She saw him completely. She sensed the length of him, knowing how his legs were placed on either side of the barstool, knowing how his body curved forward and his elbows held him propped against the bar. She saw how his throat rose from the open neck of his light blue shirt. She suddenly recognized the beauty of his neck, recognized its resemblance to the throats of young gods in classical sculptures. She recognized his hands and was pleased with the shape and proportion of fingers and palms.

Peter saw her become aware of him. He knew that she had crossed the boundary separating friend from lover. A tremor went through him and he thought it strange, and wonderful, that affection and passion should somehow have melted together in this place, under these circumstances, accompanied by that bizarre music.

He leaned forward and kissed her on the temple, feeling her tremble at the touch of his mouth. The desire came to him to put his arm around her, lift her from the chair into his lap and crush her against his body. He smiled at his own ardor, amused, even as his muscles tensed, at the predictability of his response. He found it touching that even he could be reduced to a cliché at such a moment.

He saw Dina turn shy and it caused him a perverse pleasure. He knew that he was close to becoming unreasonable and struggled to discipline himself. They were here for a purpose. Now that Dina had taken that step toward him, consummation could wait; he did not want to wait. He forced himself to move away from her.

“God!” he said again. This time it was a prayer in praise of the power of the body.

Dina was silent, trying to rid herself of the surprising shyness that had overwhelmed her. She recovered slowly, regaining a measure of her self-knowledge.

“You’re rotten with romance,” she told herself. “Down deep inside you there’s a wimp waiting for the prince to come and take charge.” She drained her glass, still scolding herself. “He’s no prince: he’s a damn smart man. Or maybe he’s a damn smart boy. You don’t know which, do you? That semi-radical style of his and the mind that always seems to be in opposition.” She closed her eyes. “What will his politics be in bed?” she wondered.

She felt Peter’s hand on her shoulder and looked at him. He bent forward and spoke in her ear.

“Don’t worry,” he said.

She inspected him. Did he know what she was worrying about? Was he that clever?

“Whatever it is, don’t worry,” he said, knowing without her having said anything.

She did not answer him. Doubt had dug a moat around her emotions and she was beginning to regret the passion that had moved her just seconds earlier.

Ken Takashima came to them from behind the cage of music and turned out to be a quiet, diffident man with solemn eyes and a disinclination to smile. He was silent, waiting for them to say what they wanted.

Peter ordered a drink for him and then told him what they were looking for.

"Yes, I see," Ken Takashima said, and began to strum his lower lip. "What you probably have is slip. I'd have to do some borings. . . ." His voice trailed off. "Who did the fill?" he asked.

"We don't know. I couldn't find any records," Peter said.

"Maybe it was an uncontrolled fill," Ken Takashima said slowly, his voice nearly lost in the growing tidal roar of the restaurant. The Takashima Sisters were gone and the customers had been thrown back on their own amusements.

"What's that?" Dina asked, leaning forward to hear him.

"In a job that's engineered you put down so much garbage and then sand and then compact it to a certain extent and then you start all over again," Ken Takashima explained. "Or you bring in dirt and rock. There's a right way to do it. In an uncontrolled fill they just dump the garbage any old way and you can have problems later. Stability failure, that sort of thing. How old is the fill?"

"Fifteen years or more."

"Oh." Ken Takashima thought a moment. "It shouldn't be that, then."

"It was originally marshes around here," Peter offered.

Ken Takashima nodded. "It could be stability failure, then. I should do a triaxial test. Or," he spoke quickly, his voice still faint, "it could be a densification problem, or. . ." he blinked his eyes.

"How much?" Dina stopped him.

"Or it could be the vibrations."

"What vibrations?" Peter asked.

"From the earthquakes. If you have a fill that was not compacted properly in the first place and then you add vibrations, that might be the answer."

"King's Rest isn't on a fault," Peter said. "That was the first thing I checked."

"It doesn't have to be directly on a fault. All you need are the vibrations."

“How much?” Dina insisted, wanting to bring the conversation around to the practical.

“My expenses,” Ken Takashima said.

Dina looked at him suspiciously.

“What kind of expenses?” Peter asked.

“Equipment. Nothing heavy. And the lab, and any little favors I have to do to get the tests processed.”

“What guarantee do we have that your findings will hold together? That another expert won’t have another opinion?” Peter asked.

“You mean in court?” Ken Takashima asked. Peter nodded. “When you take a core sample of the organic material and do tests for sheer strength to find out if the frictional resistance along the sliding plane. . . .” Ken Takashima stopped and then began again. “Look, the fill is either good or it isn’t. If it isn’t you can find out how off it is.”

“Their experts will say you’re lying,” Peter said. He did not explain who “they” were.

“Then their experts will be lying,” Ken Takashima said patiently. “Tests don’t lie. If you have the results of the tests in front of you, and you’ve had any training and experience in the business, there’s only certain conclusions you can draw. And those conclusions can’t be the opposite of the truth. It’s like looking at human tissue under a microscope. It’s fat, or it’s muscle, or it’s connective tissue and it’s either healthy or it isn’t. And you can see what’s wrong with it.”

“When can you do it?” Dina asked, impatient now to arrange matters. Her wariness of the musician had disappeared.

“I’ll call a buddy tomorrow,” Ken Takashima said. “We have to set up some lab time. So I guess I can take a look at the place tomorrow. Early afternoon.”

“I’m free,” Dina said. “Do you want to make it around one?”

“Yes, one o’clock. I won’t be getting up until ten. We

have another show to do." Ken Takashima looked up at the stage for a moment and then looked away, as if the instruments, the microphones, the lights were of no importance.

"Eleven o'clock," he said, "we do our Roaring Twenties act."

Dina put one hand on her forehead, shading her eyes so that Ken Takashima would not see her reaction.

"The girls come out in flapper costumes, with straw hats and canes. It's a funny mixture but none of our audiences have ever caught the error. Either they have no memory, or no knowledge of the past, or they accept anything as long as they think they're being entertained." Ken Takashima made a small gesture with his hand. "I've tried to understand why nobody calls us on it. But I can't."

Dina felt as if she was suffocating. The conversation had made her anxious, as if questions that she had not resolved for herself were being asked in a context that had nothing to do with her own uneasiness. She had always felt that one's anxieties were the last area of privacy allowed one in this time of public confession. Ken Takashima talked so calmly; he seemed bemused by the audience's lack of sensitivity. Dina thought it was more frightening, more important than that.

"Do you want to stay for the next show?" Ken Takashima asked.

"No, thank you," Dina said, sliding from the barstool and hoping that Peter would join her with no argument. She saw that he was putting some money on the bar and relaxed slightly:

Peter sensed that something was wrong, that Dina was tense and eager to leave. "We'd better get going," he said and shook hands with the musician.

Ken Takashima politely walked them to the restaurant door as if this place, filled with the odors of roasted chicken and lobster, the hot blood smell of rare roast beef held too

long under orange heat lamps, the stale smell of air-conditioning fighting a losing battle against cigarette smoke, was his home.

Peter hesitated at the opening door. "Telephone us if you can't find the way," he said. "The apartments are numbered so crazily that sometimes it's difficult. . . ."

Ken Takashima smiled for the first time. "I have an unerring sense of direction," he said. "I never get lost."

They were out of the restaurant and into Peter's car. Dina was shivering.

"What's wrong?" Peter asked, not touching her, not daring to intrude himself on her distress.

"Sometimes," Dina said quietly, "I feel that we have no history. Maybe that's why everyone lives the way they do around here, with no sense of tomorrow. Or all those experiments, all that trying to find new ways of being. People are adrift and it's scary."

She was almost whispering, but even so Peter could hear the pain in her voice. He reached toward her and gathered her into his arms. "It's okay, Deen," he murmured. He had been reluctant to even comfort her for a moment for he had not believed her to be so complicated, so capable of questioning the lives surrounding her. He had thought that she had a solid hold on this world, this community, for she had always spoken so directly and seemed to have her own set of ethics. Lately he had begun to have reservations about her, thinking that her self-confidence was not all she pretended it to be.

Dina had changed her way of dressing, of holding herself, in just the short time since she had left her job with David Nash. Peter had seen her efficiency in the office. She had looked the part of the competent secretary. Even her clothes had been businesslike. Her hair had been unvaryingly controlled. Her movements had been neat. But in the last two weeks her style had become more fluid. Her hair hung absolutely straight and loose now, her gestures were lazier,

as if in giving up responsibility for the running of the office she had also given up the necessity of being in complete control of her physical being. The first time he had seen her in a pair of jeans and a blue work shirt he had almost not recognized her.

"It's just premenstrual tension," Dina said suddenly, in an attempt to lighten the mood. She could not be blamed for a temporary emotional aberration caused by a hormonal imbalance.

He laughed, touched by the openness of the excuse.

"Or high barometric pressure," he said.

"Yes, that's always a killer," Dina agreed with him. She was speaking more normally now. His arms had tightened around her. When he had first touched her, his touch had been light, tentative.

"Let's go back to my place," Dina said.

"I just can't take Gigi tonight," Peter said, starting the car.

Peter drove to his apartment. He guided her past the chlorine smell of the swimming pool. The underwater lights were still on and Dina could feel the damp that hovered above and around the pool. The pale turquoise patch gleamed in the dark but it was not inviting. She could not imagine swimming there now. The sound of splashing, the foaming of the water around kicking feet would have been too private, too intimate. It would have been an invitation to watch, turning the people behind the rows of apartment doors into voyeurs. She was glad that Peter did not suggest they use the pool.

He led her directly to his apartment, not saying a word. He stood in front of his door as he opened it. It was as if his key in the lock was the beginning of a secret that he planned to reveal to her. He stepped aside to allow her to enter and then closed the world out with the snap of the double lock and the rattle of the safety chain. He lit one lamp and then went into the kitchen, returning with two glasses and a bottle of wine.

Dina looked around the room in which he had left her, noticing the beige walls and tweed carpeting. The furniture and window coverings were nondescript but all that blandness was simply a background for the anarchy which reigned in Peter's apartment. Piles of lawbooks stood everywhere, surrounded by sliding mountains of paperbacks. The couch was piled high with files held together with string. A bicycle leaned against one wall and a set of hubcaps nested in one corner. Stacks of framed lithographs leaned against two massive stereo speakers.

Peter handed her a glass of wine. She gripped it nervously with both hands. Peter was touching her hair. Then his hand was touching her face and his other hand was touching her breast and then his arms were around her. They were kissing and then she put the wine glass down on one of the speakers. Peter took off his shirt and threw it in the corner.

She put her hands on his bare skin and felt the warmth of him. She had been prepared for him to be pale and skinny. She had always thought of him that way and the fact that he was tanned and well-muscled made him a stranger for a moment. They went into the bedroom and he helped her take off her clothes. It was a very shy and ticklish business and she thought it might go wrong then, but he made it right very quickly with his mouth and his caresses. She thought then that she might be going blind for she could see nothing although her eyes were wide open. Then she realized that it was the most profound passion she had ever felt with a man and she stopped thinking altogether.

She no longer felt when he touched her, she felt only the results of his touch. There was no fumbling, nor hesitation, nor awkwardness now. One sensation led into another and then beyond.

When he entered her it was just the next logical step and she screamed because of the intensity of what she was feeling.

There was never a false movement, nor did he ever err in the way he held her or weighed on her. There was no question of his being deliberately generous to her or of having to delay or to be clever about the way he used her. They simply joined together and moved as one, her entire body gripping him, he clasping her violently. She heard, and discounted, his moans just as he ignored the sounds she was making. When the first climax came she shrieked through a throat so tight that it sounded like a sigh. Then she awakened to hear Peter hissing as the orgasm shook him. There was no pause between the end of pleasure and its renewal, it was simply that each exchange had a different quality: some tender, some violent, and the last, early in the morning, annihilating.

The next day Dina's inner thighs ached and each step she took reminded her of the night. Memories of their coupling would come to her, accompanied by stabs of pleasure or half-embarrassed giggling.

She groaned slightly as she sat down next to him on the couch, feeling as if her hip sockets had been twisted and the ligaments stretched past the limits of their endurance.

"And about time, too," she said to herself, picking at her chapped lips.

Peter had been unbearably cheerful from the moment he had risen from the rumpled, fragrant bed. He had whistled, he had hummed, he had embraced her once with a bearish growl of gratification sounding in his throat. But he had not kissed her, he had not spoken to her.

"No man is perfect," Dina thought wryly to herself. "Even Mr. Love, here." She would have welcomed some playful tenderness, some quiet affection.

Peter looked up at her. "What is it?" he asked in response to the involuntary sadness in her face.

"I hurt all over," she said lightly.

He put down the cup he had been holding in his hand and pushed her down onto the couch. "Where?" he demanded.

"I'll kiss it and make it well."

"Oh, no more," Dina protested. His hands were rough and sly as he wrestled her into the position he wanted. "Oh," she said, startled and then delighted as his mouth claimed its right to speak and his teeth became wise in their conviction and his tongue grew devilish in its logic. Then her head went back and she gasped in agreement as she succumbed, once again, to the thoroughly unreasonable force of his arguments.

IX

Almost imperceptibly something had changed at the Spire Club. One day Viveca's favorite waiter was no longer there. She was surprised that he had said nothing to her about leaving since she presumed herself to be his favorite customer. She was even more irritated when she could not get a straight answer to her questions about him. There was an uneasy silence from the club manager followed by hurried explanations that were not explanations. Viveca was left with the feeling that the man had done something dishonest, or immoral, and had been fired.

Although dissatisfied with the explanation Viveca had nonetheless continued inviting people to lunch at the Spire Club and spending several evenings a week there. Her guests were usually women older than she, women whose husbands were business acquaintances of Alec's.

When anyone asked Viveca what Alec did for a living she invariably answered: "Oh, he's a consultant to large corporations," and then changed the subject. She and Alec had always been financially secure, having managed to come out of Africa with a portion of their fortune intact. In spite of the rigid currency controls that made it impossible for the average emigrant to remove his cash and property from the country, Alec and Viveca had cleverly reinvented a system known to earlier generations of well-to-do Europeans forced to flee their own countries. The Bosts had converted the bulk of their holdings to cash. With the cash they had purchased a

carefully balanced choice of Old Master drawings, uncut diamonds and other equally transportable treasures. Although the law forbade the exportation of money there was no such barrier for household goods and antiques.

The diamonds had been bought through an acquaintance with contacts in the diamond business. In spite of the stiff controls that DeBeers places on its resources there was a gray area, a small world of dealers operating in parallel with the legitimate merchants. Alec chose to buy and transport rough stones because there was no customs duty levied on such merchandise imported into the United States. In fact, their entire fortune was not subject to customs for the enlightened American government does not tax antiques, fine art or uncut gemstones.

The Old Master drawings were carefully placed for auction and private sale, yielding more than the Bosts had hoped. Most of the diamonds were sold in New York through a friend of their contact in Africa. Alec had cleverly held back some stones. They now reposed in a chamois bag at the back of a safety deposit box in the King's Rest First National Bank. It had been a wise decision not to sell all of the diamonds for the price had gone up several times since their arrival.

In spite of the general disapproval in which the Republic of South Africa was held, the Bosts had found American companies quite willing to do business there. American businessmen might indeed decry the immorality of South African politics, but that was one thing and profits another. Alec soon found a niche for himself as consultant and go-between. He earned high fees and demanded a percentage of any contract he instigated. His income and his job put the Bosts on the Internal Revenue Service's list of individuals whose tax returns were audited with irritating regularity.

Viveca's lunches were part of Alec's business and, as such, deductible. The Spire Club had been a perfect place to

entertain those ladies whose reports of Viveca's charm and generosity inevitably influenced their husbands in Alec's favor. The Spire Club was so exclusive, or purported to be so, that the ladies looked forward to future invitations if only to be able to say that they frequented the place.

But now it was no longer just a matter of Viveca's favorite waiter having been replaced. One day none of the original restaurant staff was to be found. Their places had been taken by younger, less experienced men who turned out to be, for the most part, unemployed actors. Even more horrifying was the appearance of two waitresses.

When Viveca complained to the club manager he spread his hands helplessly and said: "What can I do, Mrs. Bost? It's that law about equal employment opportunity. We could not refuse to hire those girls." The establishment had lost a certain tone.

Viveca reported her distress to David Nash. "Just look at it!" she had exclaimed over drinks one evening. "It looks like a Howard Johnson's!"

David had sought to calm her, all the while feeling uneasy. Brock had not consulted him about the change, had not asked for David's advice. It was not like Brock to take a step like that without worrying about the legal implications.

The next change concerned the recreation and health facilities. Before, it had been merely a matter of presenting oneself at the "Spa," as it was called. The sauna had always been ready, the handball courts available eighteen hours a day, a masseur ever on duty. Now, suddenly, one had to make an appointment. The sauna functioned only from noon to nine and the masseur had disappeared.

"What's going on, David?" Sonny DeLane asked. "I tried to get my usual Saturday massage and Felipe wasn't there."

"I don't know," David replied, not particularly sympathetic to Sonny's complaints. He considered massage

sheer sybaritic self-indulgence, a completely unnecessary frill demanded by nouveau riche social incompetents. He could admit of the necessity of therapeutic massage for athletes with strained muscles or invalids suffering from rare diseases; a healthy man had no need of such treatment. David wondered why this service had been curtailed, but his general dislike of Sonny DeLane defused his curiosity and he did not pursue the matter.

A few days later David came into his office to find a message from Denny Brock waiting for him. Brock wanted to see him as soon as possible.

“Can’t I telephone him?” David asked Donna, his new secretary, a girl so pale of personality that she sometimes seemed to disappear. David had, once or twice, looked at her seated at her desk and not seen her, so transparent was she.

“He said to come over,” Donna insisted. Her voice was as weightless as a windblown dandelion and David had to force himself to hear what she said.

“Okay, I’m going over there.”

He barely saw her nod.

David was ushered into Denny Brock’s office by Sylv, a man whose function was ill-defined but whose presence was inevitable. Denny Brock never went anywhere without Sylv. Sylv was his driver, his receptionist, his go-fer. Yet he was not a servant for he functioned as a friend to Brock. They went to the race track together, Sylv placing bets for himself, as well as for Brock, and collecting the winnings after each race. Sylv accompanied Brock on his frequent trips to Las Vegas, Mexico, New York and Miami.

Sometimes Brock would scream at Sylv, cursing him for a blunder or a lapse in judgment. Sylv would flush, the red rising into his alcohol-etched skin, darkening the already apparent red threads into a purple spider’s web across his cheeks. His hair was white; one could not tell if it was naturally so, or sun-bleached, but in no way did it indicate age. Sylv had an unaging face and the remnants of an

athlete's body. At those times when Brock shouted at him, he would push one fist against the other, his muscles straining, the pectorals heaving with effort, or anger.

"But what did he do?" David would ask and Brock would slam his hands on his desk and thunder: "*He* knows what he did," and immediately change the subject.

"Nice day," David said to Sylv as the man opened the door for him. Sylv smiled and nodded. Sylv always smiled; it did not mean a thing. It was not friendly, nor threatening: it was a tic used in place of words. Sylv had no conversation and rarely said anything out loud.

"Come in, come in," Brock shouted as David entered the office. "Glad you could come."

"Your summons was very specific," David said dryly.

"How's life treatin' ya?" Brock demanded. He expected a favorable report.

"Fine, fine," David said. Lately he had found himself able, or almost anxious, to complain about small things that bothered him. But he still kept himself strongly in check when in this man's presence.

"We've got a thing to do," Brock said with no further preamble, "and we want you to work it out."

"What is it?" David asked.

"We want to change the status of the Spire Club."

"Oh?" David settled back into the electric blue couch that was the second largest piece of furniture in the office. Brock sat behind a monumental desk which would have been suitable in a larger room but which in this office, encumbered as it was with a heteroclite jumble of objects, seemed to take up half the floor space. "To what do you want to change it?"

"We want to make it like a country club."

David pursed his lips. "It's like that now, in effect."

"No, it isn't. Nobody pays dues to belong. What we've got there is an expensive community center. We want to open it up to other people. People from outside the Spires."

David thought about it for a moment. "My first reaction,"

he said slowly, "is that you've got the problem of exclusivity. Right now your residents feel that the Spire Club belongs to them simply because they live there. They know who they'll meet when they go to the Club. If you have strangers coming in. . . ."

"We'll screen 'em," Brock insisted. "We're not going to let in just anybody."

"That could be a problem, recent court decisions being what they are. If you start screening, what will your criteria be? For instance: will you allow blacks to join? Latins? Jews? You have a pretty homogeneous group right now, people who have a lot in common, people who have chosen to live in the Spires because it suits their taste, their attitudes. Once you open it up to outsiders you'll pretty much be forced to let in anybody."

"It'll be expensive to join," Brock growled, "that'll keep out the punks." Brock evidently could not find another word to describe the society who would be barred from the Spire Club.

"How expensive?" David asked.

"Three thousand, something like that."

"To join, or yearly dues?"

"To join. Dues is on top of that."

David shook his head admiringly. "That is steep," he admitted. "What about the residents? They already belong."

"Naw, they'll have to join. But it'll be less expensive for them because they live in the Spires. A thousand, maybe."

"What would the dues cover?"

"What?"

"What services would the dues cover?" David asked.

"Whatever there is now," Brock said, seeming surprised at the question. "The right to use the facilities."

"For free."

"Naw!" Brock was becoming irritated with David's questions, and seemingly even more so with his inability to grasp

the construction of this new idea. "The dues buy you the entrance fee to the facilities. Then they got to pay for each thing. So much for the sauna, so much for the racquetball courts, so much for the tennis, like that."

"Ah," David said. "I see." He was staring at Brock in amazement, although the expression on his face was blank. Brock thought that David was showing subtle disapproval and thought it proper to explain. "It's been costing money," he said. "We've been giving it away free."

"Not exactly free," David said softly and fell silent.

Brock was often impatient with David's silences, with the short phrases he uttered when he was giving himself time to think. David thought Brock interpreted his hesitation as distaste or shock, the fastidious reaction of a man whom Brock defined as "classy."

Sylv shifted his feet nervously. "Maybe David wants a drink," he said to Brock. It was one of his rare interruptions, a phrase he used to give Brock maneuvering time.

"Or coffee?" Brock offered.

"No, no thank you," David answered. "Now, what do you want me to do?"

"Study the idea," Brock said quickly, glad that David was not going to fight him. "Come up with some angles I might have missed. You know more about ins and outs than I do." This last flattery was a bonus, a kind of polite lie offered to David to compensate him for any hesitation he might have had about the plans. They both knew that when it came to ins and outs Brock was a genius. He needed David to stop him from committing such illegalities as he might overlook, or be ignorant of, in his enthusiasm.

"I'll give it some thought," David said, his tone and choice of words confirming that he thought it a bad idea.

"Get back to me real soon," Brock said firmly, letting David know that there would be no backing down, no leeway for compromise. Brock meant to have his country club.

"I'd like to tell you something about what's going on at the Spire Club right now," David said, sure that there was a link between this conversation and the subject of Viveca's complaints. "The service has become impossible. Amateurish. The recreational services have been cut back. You can't take a sauna anymore. I've even found it difficult to play handball whenever I want to. The courts are closed, or overbooked."

"That club manager," Brock said vehemently. "He's supposed to take care of it. If he's falling down on the job we'll have to fire him, get someone in who'll run it right." Brock sounded angry but David was not convinced. Knowing Brock he realized that if the man had been truly surprised about the way the Spire Club was being run he would have been upset, curious about details and eager to act. If he was unaware of what was going on he would have picked up the telephone and called the manager immediately. One of Brock's strengths was that he was a bear about details.

"I'll talk to him," Brock said with finality, putting an end to the discussion.

"Anything else?" David asked, rising.

"Nah, that's it. What's your hurry? Stick around and have some lunch."

"I'd better get back," David said firmly. At one time he had accepted Brock's invitations but the ensuing hours had been unsettling and alien to him. Brock was given to answering his constant telephone calls with profane shouts in place of social niceties. Then he would mumble quietly, his hand held half over the mouthpiece so that anyone near him could not hear what he was saying. He spoke of business matters David knew nothing about, discussing them without the use of proper nouns or place names. "You know that thing I was talkin' about yesterday?" he would say, "the thing back east with what's-his-name and the turn-around? He took six, eight and ten, can ya believe it?"

Sylv would smile and nod and Brock would continue

enumerating "things" and "guys" and numbers that had no meaning out of context. David never knew if Brock was speaking in thousands or millions.

When he had first been invited to lunch with them David had thought they would go to one of the marina's restaurants or, perhaps, drive some miles to an expense-account supported establishment. But Denny always ate lunch in his office. Sylv would bring in cartons of Chinese food ordered from a place near the marina, or there would be thick delicatessen sandwiches of so exotic a taste that David knew they had to have come from Denny's old neighborhood, far across the continent. Occasionally there would be a hot lunch served on thick, cafeteria plates that Sylv kept in the bathroom. That food would be redolent of tomatoes and garlic, and the obviously home-made pastas would be shiny with olive oil. The food was thick and messy and was always accompanied by a rough California wine served from a jug. The meals were invariably punctuated by more telephone calls and fitful, uneasy attempts at dutiful conversation. David had quickly abandoned any pretense of socializing with the man.

"Work, work, work," Brock said jovially, "you're going to kill yourself. Whyn't you relax, or something?"

"I try to," David said dryly, "on the handball court, or in the sauna. When I can manage to find one or the other available."

"It'll be taken care of, don't worry," Brock assured him. "Even if I have to get a new club manager."

It was only later, when he was back in his office, that David realized that Brock had probably meant to change club managers in any event and that David's complaints had given him an excuse to do so without having to explain his decision. Brock had offered the change too quickly, too emphatically; the man usually took his time about making decisions of such import.

The next few days were taken up with establishing the

legal basis for the change in the Spire Club. David studied the format of several country clubs in the state, examining their differences and similarities. At the end of the week he had created an impressive-looking document to present to Brock.

“Just what we wanted,” Brock told him on the telephone.

“I’m glad you’re pleased,” David said carefully.

“There’s just one thing: the membership committee.”

“What’s the problem?”

“It’s made up of club members,” Brock said. “There’s nobody from management on it.”

“The members will have to live with the new people; you never come to the Spire Club. I would think that they would rather be in charge of it.”

“No good, David. We’re not protected. They could let in anyone they wanted, or keep people out just because they didn’t like the color of the guy’s skin.” Brock was sounding prematurely indignant.

“So you’re planning a completely unrestricted membership?” David asked. He was surprised. He would have thought that Brock would have been eager to keep membership restricted, if only in the name of good business, and that would have given David more work and unending trouble.

“I know the law,” Brock said. “And if a black guy can afford it then he’s probably okay, you know? To make the money, he had to bust his ass to get where he is.”

David was amused at Brock’s defense of the brotherhood of cash.

“I’m not fighting you on it,” David said mildly. “I was just interested in your reasoning.”

“Okay, so that’s settled. About the new member approval: I think it should be an administration perogative.”

David was always taken aback by Brock’s varying personalities. The man usually spoke in the style of his boyhood, mixing “dems” and “tas” and “yeahs” indiscriminately;

then, occasionally, he would produce a sentence straight out of business school, wielding it as the final thrust in his argument. When that happened David knew that further suggestion or protest would be unavailing.

“I’ll change it,” he said evenly.

“Good. I’ll get Board approval.”

David smiled to himself. Brock never had trouble receiving Board approval for his schemes:

“We’ll go with this new plan in six weeks,” Brock continued. “You should have it registered by then.”

David grunted. There would be a lot of work involved in implementing the new plan. The residents would have to be informed about the change coming into their lives and the first howls of indignation would have to be dealt with. The financial side would have to be organized. Brock would have something to say about that. One thing bothered David: there had been no discussion about the method to be used in finding new members. That, also, was Brock’s area of expertise but David had expected to be consulted.

He suddenly realized that within six weeks outsiders would be invading the Spire Club, bringing their own habits, their own expectations with them. David felt a twinge of reluctance at the idea that the atmosphere at the Club would be changed.

“They will adapt to our ways,” he thought, knowing all the while that he had less than two months of familiarity and comfort left. Years earlier he would have looked forward to the newcomers, eager to test himself against them, to see what they had to offer him. He would have attempted to create some sort of filtering system that would allow them to be absorbed with little effect. Now he was just uncomfortable thinking of the upheaval which they would bring. He suddenly felt like an outcast, like someone about to be deprived of his home and habits.

Viveca stood peering out the Spire Club’s windows,

trying to see past the grime that had been allowed to accumulate there.

"I won't stand for it," Viveca exclaimed. "Look at this mess. The windows haven't been washed in weeks!"

David fell back a step, shocked by her vehemence.

"And what about this?" she demanded, waving a new brochure at him. "It just won't do!" Her eyes were stretched wide in fury. "Isn't that right?" she demanded of Alec who was standing behind her, a bemused expression on his face.

"I don't see what we can do about it," Alec said gently, "except move."

"But we have another three years on our lease!" Viveca exploded. "And I will not be forced out of my home!"

Alec put an awkward hand on her shoulder. David realized that it was the first time he had ever seen him touch her in public. It looked unnatural, as if the contact was unfamiliar to both of them.

"Dear girl," Alec said briskly, "there is nothing to be done. We don't own the Club; it seems that we've been using it on sufferance." He looked steadily at David. "Even though the use of the Club was presented to us as an integral part of the services we could expect. Now we are told that it was a favor. The gentlemen who own the place have their own reasons for this change. Pecuniary, I should imagine."

"The idea is that it should be more like a country club," David said lamely. The thought again came to him that perhaps there was more behind this move. He had forgotten his initial suspicions while working to bring about the change.

"I'm going to form a committee!" Viveca said indignantly. David smiled wearily. Another committee to worry about. He had heard of a committee being formed at Newport Mews: Dina was probably going ahead with her plans. David had not been able to pin down who was involved in it with Dina, other than Peter Trask. King's Rest was under attack from two directions and it seemed that, by chance or by plan,

he was going to be the target at which the attacks would be directed. It was decidedly strange.

During the weeks that followed David was approached every day by residents of the three Spires. He was complained to, cursed at and, surprisingly, begged to do something to avert the coming tragedy. He learned, to his amazement, that there were people living in the Spires who could not afford the membership fee and the yearly dues. True, the present residents were to be charged only twelve hundred dollars a year, as compared to the thirty-three hundred dollars a year outsiders would have to pay; but even so there were individuals who had considered their entry to the Spire Club as part of their rent, who had used the Club as their only source of entertainment, as their bar, as a second living room. There were people living in the Spires who existed by using credit cards for every expense beyond their rent. They survived from month to month, delaying the payment of one bill or another, purchasing what they needed with their American Express or Diner's Club or Master Charge cards. David learned that the Spires were famous for the number of repossessions that took place there. The men of the Marshall's Office had nicknamed the place "The Merry-Go-Round," so often did they come around to make off with someone's automobile.

One day, while speaking with the representative of the insurance underwriters, he heard the man call the Spires "Two-Bit City." When pressed for an explanation the man had fumbled for words and then had admitted that it was an expression used by the local firefighters when talking about the Spires.

"This one guy told me it came from the fact that a lot of the people living there don't have more than tip money in their pockets. I don't know, myself; someone else told me it was because the buildings are so. . ." the insurance man hesitated, "so flimsily built."

"Flimsy?" David repeated angrily.

"Listen, David, it isn't that anything's sub-standard, you know. We'd never have agreed to cover the place if it had been. It's just that as good as the place looks from the outside, on the inside, where you can't see it, certain, uh, choices were made."

"Choices," David repeated flatly.

"Yes, if they had their pick of two or three different items of nearly equal quality, they always chose the cheapest. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with the place, don't misunderstand. It's simply that we knew what we were dealing with."

"If it's so bad, why did you take the account?" David asked harshly.

"Hey, David, business is business, right? It's not like the towers are going to collapse. Hell, they'll still be there when we're both gone. Unless they knock them down and put something else in place of. . . ."

"What are you talking about?" David asked impatiently. He could feel his temper flaring; he knew that this irritability was completely out of character, that the pressure of the last weeks had caused this temporary loss of control.

"Nothing, nothing. It's just that there've been some rumors floating around, you know."

"I don't know. And I'd be very grateful if you'd enlighten me."

"Hell, David, it's only rumors. I shouldn't be repeating them."

And David had to be satisfied with that, except that he was not satisfied. He tried to understand what was in Brock's mind. He tried to put together what he knew, tried to make some sense of it. But he was too immersed in the life of the Spires, too bound by the daily effort to cope with the tide of protest to be able to see things clearly.

Some of the residents had spoken to their lawyers about the impending transformation and David had had to spend sev-

eral repetitive hours on the telephone, urging his colleagues to carefully read the original prospectus that each resident had been given before leasing an apartment at the Spires.

"The use of the Spire Club shall be restricted to residents of the Spires and their guests. Guests may be admitted upon reception of a request, indicating the day of the projected visit, the hour of arrival and the approximate amount of time each guest wishes to spend on the premises. Such requests shall be made not less than twenty-four hours before the guest's arrival. . .no, Counselor, further down the page, paragraph six. Yes, that's it, the part about the Spire Club being an amenity not included in the common understanding of general services provided by the terms of the lease and, further on, yes, access, use and enjoyment of the Spire Club being subject to revocation at any time by King's Rest Enterprises, etc."

Brock had insisted on that paragraph, wanting to retain the right to keep out "punks and perverts," as he had put it. David was amazed at the man's foresight. It was almost as if he had envisioned this newest maneuver all those years ago.

"Yes, well, Counselor," David replied to the indignant voices on the telephone, "your client signed the lease and was happy to do so at the time. You might have stated your reservations then. Not now."

The atmosphere in the Spire Club had soured. David could feel the eyes looking at him, and those that turned away at his entrance. Viveca and Alec still invited him to their table even though, from time to time, one of the other people at the table would leave after he sat down. Viveca had calmed somewhat, her indignation soothed by the fact that she and Alec could afford the fees.

It was Timmons who displayed the most distress. He spent many miserable hours at the bar, trying to squeeze all the benefits possible out of the time left.

"I can't afford the dues," he lamented to Viveca. He was

waiting for her to offer him a gift of membership in the new club. In a way he felt she owed it to him. He had always been available whenever she had a party or people to entertain. He had smiled at her guests, especially the middle-aged ladies with their blushing make-up and sad skin. He believed that he had been amusing, painfully making conversation with people in whom he had no interest, all for Viveca's sake. Timmons conveniently ignored the favors Viveca had done him, the people to whom she had introduced him, the stage she had given him on which to perform. "I just don't have the money right now," Timmons told her.

"Oh, pet, that's too bad," Viveca said, not taking the hint. She was truly sorry that Timmons would not be coming around any more. He had provided her with moments of diversion and he was beautiful. She would miss looking at his perfect face and body.

Seeing that Viveca was not inclined to help him, Timmons sought out Alec. He told his story in the same manner, with disarming frankness and charming agitation. Alec listened and shook his head: "Tough luck," he said, "but maybe after your first movie contract, huh?" He had not meant to be cruel but sometimes, with Timmons, it was difficult for Alec to restrain himself.

Sonny DeLane had shown up at David's office late one morning. He had been strangely uneasy and fumbling. It was completely unlike the man whose intrusive arrogance David found hard to bear.

"I'll come right to the point," Sonny said and then proceeded to talk around the subject for several minutes. "The problem is," he finally said, "I don't know if I should join up."

He made it sound like a crackpot political movement.

"I don't know, Dave," Sonny continued, seemingly unaware that nobody ever called David 'Dave,' "all those strangers coming in. It's okay now, you know; we all like

each other and nobody bothers me. We're a tight group of friends."

David nodded sympathetically, although he knew, from his own experience at the Club, that very few friendships had been kindled there and that everyone he had met was similarly alone and self-protective.

"I'm just afraid," Sonny continued, "that I won't have a moment's peace with all sorts of strangers."

"I can appreciate your misgivings," David said firmly, "but they are totally unfounded. You know that the membership will be carefully screened. And the price of admission is really high. That will weed out anybody who would be likely to bother you."

"I don't know," Sonny said slowly, willing to be convinced. It would have been more satisfying for him if two or three fans had somehow slipped through the net of selection.

"It's going to be one of the most exclusive country clubs in the United States," David continued briskly. How many times would he have to repeat this speech? He was resentful at being forced to act as press agent for the Spire Club.

"So you think it's okay?" Sonny pressed him.

"Very okay," David said with conviction. He saw Sonny to the door, standing in the middle of the reception area to watch Sonny flirt with Donna, to watch Donna close in on herself, like an animal trying to blend into the background when under attack.

"Nice girl," Sonny said automatically, praising David for his choice of secretaries.

"She could be King Kong and he'd still say 'nice girl,'" David thought, smiling and shaking Sonny's hand.

The strange thing was that by force of repetition David came to half believe in the exclusiveness of the new club. And the thought struck him, one night, that it was possible that he, himself, would have to pay dues in order to be a member. The next day David telephoned Brock to report on

the state of the preparations, finishing his conversation with a demand:

“I take it that club membership is one of my perks.”

Brock laughed and said: “Sure, David, you’re a member. No problem.”

“Just checking,” David said coolly. He felt foolish and vaguely humiliated and could not fathom why he should be having that reaction.

“We’ve got a new club manager coming in Thursday,” Brock said. “A guy I hired from The Blue Ridge Club.”

“I don’t believe I’ve heard of that,” David said, wondering if he should have known that particular club, cursing the amount of information one needed to get along in this world and the impossibility of knowing what you lacked if you were not born to it.

“Fancy club,” Brock said in an off-handed way, “Kentucky. Very exclusive.”

It meant nothing to David. He was sure that someone would have heard of it. He would check.

“I’ve got a couple of guys coming in to handle the membership drive,” Brock continued, not knowing how provincial he sounded. “They’re going to take over those empty offices on the mezzanine floor in The Doges.”

“Why tell me?” David asked.

“I’d like you to take the new club manager around. I know,” Brock said quickly, “that isn’t what you’re here for, but Sylv and me’s got to go out of town and someone from the main office has to handle it. It’s only polite. The man’s name is Gus Rhine.”

“Of course I’ll do it,” David said coldly, “but I hope it doesn’t get to be a habit.” He realized that he must let Brock know where he stood on the subject. Brock was the kind of man who once granted a liberty considered he had gained a right.

"It's only because we won't be here," Brock repeated apologetically. "I know you'll make the guy feel at home."

"What about the membership people?"

"Oh, Rhine will take care of them. Don't worry, David, everything will turn out very well."

David hung up the telephone and sat quietly for a long while. He felt confused and uneasy. He had done what he had been hired to do, yet he was dissatisfied. He sensed that things were happening somewhere beyond his vision, beyond his ability to grasp them. He was convinced now that Brock had secrets from him, that Brock was misusing him in a way he could not fathom. Two years ago Brock would not have used David as a greeter, would not have felt bold enough to demand such services from the company lawyer.

"I'm being paranoid," David said out loud. Then: "No, I'm not. Something's crooked."

He thought. "What could be crooked?" The sound of his voice startled him. He was empty and abruptly lost.

"I should leave this," he thought. It was the first time such an idea had entered his mind. To leave King's Rest, the place where he had earned reputation and respect, as well as more money than he had ever dreamed. "Where? What other kind of law? What other place?"

David shook himself out of the reverie. It was ridiculous to be thinking of leaving. He earned more money at King's Rest than he knew what to do with. "In a manner of speaking," David said aloud, grinning. He knew very well what to do with the money, how to spend it, where to invest it. The one thing that chagrined him was that the I.R.S. taxed perks, too.

"The work certainly isn't difficult," he said to himself, feeling a vague regret, which passed almost as quickly as he thought it, that there was no challenge here and that he was merely marking time.

"I need some exercise," David thought. He began to

daydream, seeing the playground, the basketball games, the driving effort that served to rid him of thought and allowed him to be nothing but movement and emotion.

"Tonight," he promised himself. He would join in a pick-up game. "Nine o'clock," he planned, "plenty of time for a drink at the Spire Club and dinner beforehand."

And perhaps Mallorey would be there. "Can she afford to join?" he wondered. If she couldn't perhaps he would offer her a gift. Or arrange with Brock to make her an honorary member. Would she accept that? "Maybe make Joshua an honorary member, too. Good publicity." Then David remembered. "I should visit him in the hospital," he thought with great reluctance. He really did not want to see the other man in that place, in that condition. The very idea of illness, of hospitals, made him uneasy. And his unease made him feel guilty, as if there was a duty of the human heart that he was shirking.

"Timmons," he thought. "I'll ask Timmons to go see him for me." David considered the young man's dilemma. He found him laughable, vulgar and irritating. If the ability to get along in David's world had been a genetic trait, Timmons would be a case of retardation. Yet at this moment, perhaps in reaction to his own social failings toward Joshua, David felt charitable.

"I could work something out for him," David thought, "if I really wanted to."

David heard himself snicker, a high, nasty sound that surprised him. "I could hire him for the Club," David thought. "Make up a job name. It would keep Viveca amused, and the other ladies."

David pictured them, the well-dressed women of a certain age who played sedate tennis and went into the shower afterward with tulle draped carefully around their hair.

He knew that he could do something for Timmons, and he thought that he would not. It was a cruelty, a manipulation, a

power that he held over the other man, even if Timmons did not know it.

"I wonder where he'll sell his ass now?" David thought. He did not question the powerful surge of moral righteousness that filled him.

X



Mallorey's days had taken on a reassuring sameness. She spent most nights in her own apartment yet, slowly, the most important adjuncts to her life had been transferred to *Moorea Cloud*: her wardrobe, toilet articles, makeup and those small, personal objects without which no place was home to her. Sometimes, now, she would find herself lacking a beauty product or a particular piece of clothing and would remember that it was in her cabin, aboard *Moorea Cloud*. Her apartment had taken on the air of an unused flat, an hotel room used only for sleeping, a temporary shelter for someone in transition.

In the mornings she exercised, cared for herself, and did errands. Occasionally she would realize that she no longer worried about herself or her future. She remembered the dull, shocked emotions after her separation from Vlad as an aberration, something that had happened to another person. She knew, deep within her, that at some point she would have to take steps, would have to contemplate the direction in which her life should grow. Each time that realization came to her she would shake it off and remember that she was devoting herself to Joshua for now. There was no time for anything else.

"I've got years," Mallorey assured herself, "and he doesn't." It seemed a small enough sacrifice to make and she was content with her own generosity.

Twice a week Mallorey lunched with Consuelo. Joshua's

wife was drinking too much and no longer trying to hide it. She had taken to ordering Gibsons before lunch and would not consider a meal complete without a full bottle of wine as accompaniment. On hot days, sitting under a canopy that she had had installed on *Moorea Cloud's* foredeck, she sucked at beercans, popping them open with a distracted finger, studying the chipped nail polish, and then tossing the rings overboard with a whipping motion of her arm.

Mallorey had tried encouraging Consuelo. She had tried scolding her. She had even tried threats. But Consuelo did not listen, did not care to find an outside interest, did not want to exercise either her body or her mind. She preferred her afternoons on deck, in tighter and tighter fitting swimsuits, watching with a disinterested eye as her thighs went slack.

Mallorey was glad that her time with Consuelo was so limited. On the afternoons of their "luncheons," as Consuelo called them, Mallorey accompanied her to the hospital and watched as she spent a short, uneasy time at Joshua's bedside. On the days that Consuelo did not go, Mallorey visited Joshua alone, bringing him the articles he requested, seeing to it that he was supplied with magazines and newspapers. His illness had made it impossible for Joshua to read anything more serious than a magazine: his concentration was nervous, at best, or perhaps he had come to feel that the contents of books were a waste of the little time he had left.

Joshua said that he wanted to leave the hospital but the doctors insisted that he stay on for a while, as if by keeping him within the walls of the medical center they could pretend that they were helping him.

"There's no cure," Joshua would say. "Just watch how they come in here. All casual and busy; but they can't look at me and they leave as fast as they can and they won't let go. I'm going home tomorrow."

Mallorey would agree with him and then suggest that he give the doctors just a few more days of his presence. "For

their sake, if not for yours," she would laugh. Grumbling, Joshua would acquiesce. She felt that he would have been disappointed if she had not convinced him to remain a few days longer. Joshua was afraid to leave the spurious safety of the cardiac unit.

"Next week, my girl," he would say. "I will absolutely leave next week."

Mallorey would kiss him goodby and drive back to the marina. She was always depressed after these visits to Joshua, and then guilty at her depression and the nagging irritation she felt at Joshua's procrastination and fear, at the little emotional games she was forced to play with him, at the reality of illness. It had seemed a wonderful, loving thing to do, sacrificing the immediate future to help Joshua. She was coming to realize that self-sacrifice was infinitely more complicated than she had thought. It was more wearing, more onerous than she could have imagined; and yet she would not give it up. She thought, confusedly, that at least here, with Joshua, she knew exactly what was expected of her, exactly what she had to do. She cared for Joshua; she did want to be with him as long as she could before he disappeared from her life. In a strange way she was still content to simply care for him, visit him, humor him. Even the staff at the hospital had come to accept her presence there. They began to treat her as if she was Joshua's wife and Consuelo nothing but a mistress, and an unsatisfactory one at that.

At the same time, as the weeks passed and her daily life turned into nothing more than preparation for those hospital visits, Mallorey grew anxious. She could not define the basis of her anxiety although she did know it was not over Joshua. She became unhappy with herself, with the way her body felt, with the way she looked. She convinced one of Joshua's doctors to give her a complete physical examination and found that she had never been healthier. There was nothing wrong with her outside of a certain nervousness which she

put down to the stress of caring for Joshua. She experimented with different sorts of make-up, as if in redesigning her face she could change the tint of her mood. No new combination of colored powders and liquids, no new configuration of cheekbones and eye shadows could solve the problem. She reverted to the subtle street make-up she had used ever since coming to California and, in one of the rare moments in which she saw herself clearly in the mirror, realized that she had never been more beautiful.

She inspected her wardrobe and decided to shop for new clothes but after a first, abortive visit to several boutiques she grew weary and told herself that she simply did not have the energy to compose a new wardrobe for herself.

The idea came to her that it was not the externals that needed changing but that there must be some lack within her. She began to dedicate three evenings a week to self-improvement. She had heard that Vincent Say, an old actor who had begun as a leading man and aged into character parts, was holding acting classes in the marina. Mallorey had acted in Vlad's films as she had done all the things he asked of her: with faith in his judgment. The fact that she had never acted before had not daunted Vlad, although it had caused Mallorey unbearable anguish during the production of the films.

Mallorey was too conscientious to feel easy about presenting herself as an actress when she was not one. She had known the photography model's techniques of relating to the camera. It was not the same in motion pictures. Mallorey had not known how to read lines. She had acted on hunch and desperation, hoping that what she did, day after day, was not embarrassingly inept. The sound stage came to seem like a chamber of horrors to her.

Vlad had been no help. It was his first picture, too, and he had his own problems. Perhaps he had believed that whatever rapport they enjoyed in their private life would continue in

their work. Or perhaps he had thought that she could carry it off. Or perhaps he had not thought at all, but had been filled with panic at the task he had undertaken and the proofs he had to give.

The first picture had been humiliating for her. The reviews had been horribly punishing. The notices that simply told the truth had been bad enough, but some critics, members of that New York crew given to intramural feuds, had thought the truth not enough. They had fired their shrapnel wit at Vlad and, as an extra added attraction, had taken Mallorey as a target of opportunity.

In that strange, movie business way, Vlad had come out well. He had climbed upward from failure to failure. The first film had not done well at the box office. Logic would have dictated his not being allowed to make another film. Instead, he was signed to a three picture contract with ever-escalating budgets. It was almost as if the professionals had been intimidated by Vlad's intellectual credentials. Or as if they were making sure that he hanged himself past all hope of resurrection.

Mallorey had appeared in the second film. This time she knew how to use the camera. In spite of Vlad's ineptitude, in spite of the ugly costumes provided by an ideologically correct but untalented designer, she looked good. She still could not act, but terror had made her reticent. She no longer gestured like a silent film actress nor grimaced like a clown. The critics all noticed the improvement, even as they wrote their scathing reviews.

Through it all Vlad insisted that the critics were hacks, or jealous, that the audience did not understand the art of the cinema, that the distributors had sabotaged him by closing the movie when seats remained empty and public indifference could not be reversed. He claimed that the production company was determined to undermine the virility of his cinematic vision by insisting on rewrites of the script, cuts in

the film and a total re-editing of the finished product. A Hollywood hack was called in to re-cut the film. The man had spent twenty years in the business. Vlad was enraged that the man obviously did not understand what Vlad had intended.

After that Mallorey began to take acting lessons. If she was going to appear in movies the least she could do for her own pride and moral comfort, if not for the audience, was to learn what was expected of her. Vlad objected, fearing that it would spoil her spontaneity.

‘I’d rather be less spontaneous and more able to say ‘good morning’ without sounding like an idiot,’ she had said. It was one of the few times that she had insisted on having her way.

The lessons had ended when she left Vlad to enjoy his emotional space. Now, however, she thought it important to continue, to learn as much as she could, even if there was no guarantee that she would ever again appear in a film.

Vincent Say had accepted her. He was a gruff-voiced, rotund man who spoke of intimate things openly, who admitted his lusts and foolishness in the public of his classes, who used all of his life as a diary from which to read passages of pain and joy and transform them into brilliance.

“I saw your movies,” Vincent said, nodding pleasantly. “The pits.”

Mallorey said nothing.

“Looked like high school drama class on a snowy night in Altoona,” he had continued, looking for some reaction from Mallorey.

“You’re right,” Mallorey had said simply. “That’s why I’m here.”

“You don’t want to blame somebody else?” he had asked in mock surprise. “The director, or the lighting man, or the best boy?”

“The director, yes,” Mallorey had answered, “for getting me into it in the first place.”

"Okay, Red," Vincent had said. "I'm going to give you a real movie-movie scene to prepare for next week." He had handed her a raggedy script that had obviously been used by platoons of actresses over the years. "It's a scene from *Miracle of the Bells*, a picture so bad that nobody involved ever talks about it. Work it out, and let's see what you do with it."

"It's a long scene," Mallorey had said dubiously, flipping the pages as she counted them.

"Just do it."

Mallorey had done it. She had presented the scene with Vincent reading her cues. She had been destroyed by the commentary afterward. She had listened to Vincent explain her mistakes, her lack of intelligence, her inability to act. Then she had watched him do the scene with another woman in the class. The next week she had presented the scene again.

"Why did you change your voice level right there?" Vincent had asked her afterward, pointing to a place in the script.

"Because she was afraid."

"Wouldn't it have been better to keep the tone even and show her fear with posture or facial expression?" Vincent asked.

"No, I don't think so," Mallorey had responded. "She's so controlled that she could have held her body in check. But her voice: I think it would have gotten away from her."

Vincent had stared at her for a moment and then nodded.
"Agreed."

After that she had known that he was not going to throw her out of the class, was not going to tell her that there was no hope for her. Vincent demanded intelligence of his students; he did not want instinct and emotion to be the only basis of their work.

"You've all seen too many movies about how people

become actors," he cried. "You think all it takes is some magic instinct. Well, you're wrong! It's a craft! Remember that. You learn how to do it by doing it, by thinking about what's going on in the scene. What you call instinct is only recognition of the familiar plus an understanding of how people's emotions work. Believe me, all the intensity in the world isn't going to help you if you don't know how to reach for a glass, or how to speak while you're supposed to be chewing a mouthful of food, or how to hit your mark bang, on the dot, each time."

There was more. There was the use of gestures which Mallorey had always thought of as arm motions used by declaimers or the studied, false hand motions of singers. Now she learned about small signals, small movements of the hands, shiftings of the eyes, the tilt of the head, the balancing of one's weight used as commentary or emphasis or negation of what was being said.

"We're not talking about the stage here," Vincent would say. "We're talking about movie technique. Small. Subtle. Restrained. When you play big for the camera, it's still smaller than what you do small on stage."

He made Mallorey conscious of the way she walked.

"Walking naturally is one of the hardest things in the world."

He made her spend six classes doing nothing but listening to the other students, insisting that she *act* listening, and not just listen. "You have to let the camera know that you're paying attention," he instructed her. She listened.

One evening Mallorey walked in to find a new member of the class. Timmons was seated by himself, in a corner, looking as beautiful as ever and completely out of his element.

"Hello, Timmons," Mallorey said cheerfully, "what are you doing here?"

"Taking a few lessons," he said nervously. He was trying

to appear calm. Or perhaps he was trying to appear nervous. It was hard to tell.

"You couldn't have chosen a better teacher," Mallorey said.

"It's just to brush up," Timmons said seriously.

"I understand," Mallorey assured him, wondering why she was so patient with him.

"You, Clarke," Vincent called, "get up here."

"Me?" Timmons looked up at the small raised dais that served as a stage.

"Go on," Mallorey urged him. "Don't be scared."

He glared at her and then, looking aggressively casual, strolled up to the stage.

"Now, Clarke, I want you to introduce yourself to everybody. No, just stand there and tell us about yourself."

The class had settled down into quiet, the dozen or so students seated on chairs or on the floor. Three young men of violently masculine appearance were lolling about the room. They were television actors and all three of them had played second leads on popular programs. They would someday all become weekly heroes in parts in which forcefulness and a certain healthy erotic aura would feed with simple directness from the screen to the minds of people in their homes. Nobody would ever question the stylized love-making they portrayed.

All three of them were homosexual and all three had learned the unwritten rules about their sexual proclivities: be cool and friendly and sincere, and never pick a sexual partner who will talk.

As Timmons stepped up onto the stage at least one of the three men surreptitiously shifted his weight. Nothing showed in their eyes. They did not look at each other knowingly and no comments were made but behind their heterosexual masks they appraised him.

"Well," Timmons began, "my name is Timmons Clarke

and I won the Olympic Marathon and now I want to be an actor. Oh, I'm twenty-seven."

That short speech was delivered in a friendly, straightforward manner as Timmons stood, chest out, body angled, hands on hips, looking like a friendly soul talking to people who would never hurt him.

"Jeezus!" a woman's voice said appreciatively.

"A-men," said one of the masculine young men, in spite of his careful training.

"Have you ever done any acting?" Vincent asked.

Mallorey could see the lie spring to Timmons' mouth, hesitate on the edge of his lips and then subside. "Nnnno," Timmons answered slowly. He shifted his weight. The overhead spot rippled over his hair and silky shirt.

"Are you married?" Vincent asked.

"Yyeess," Timmons said.

There was a burst of laughter from the others. Timmons looked around, angry and puzzled. "What's so funny?" he demanded.

"You don't sound sure if you're married or not," a young woman answered him.

"Of course I'm sure," Timmons answered heatedly.

"Yyeess," the young woman mimicked. She reproduced his tone, his hesitation, perfectly. Mallorey looked down at her hands.

"Did I do that?" Timmons asked in a boyish manner.

"Yyeess," the reply came from several people.

"Oh." Timmons stared into space, above their heads. He had shifted position again. Then he laughed. It was an embarrassed laugh, the laugh of someone who has been found out, or who has found himself out.

"How about that?" Timmons asked rhetorically.

Mallorey was still staring at her hands. She desperately hoped that nobody was fooled. She knew that the laugh was an act, that Timmons was giving this audience what he

thought would disarm them. She wondered at her own emotion over his performance.

"Red," Vincent said in her ear. Mallorey looked up at him. "You know him?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Ah. Well, what about it?" Vincent pressed.

She was reluctant to answer.

"Come on, Red," Vincent insisted.

"His act isn't usually as good as what he just did up there," Mallorey replied coldly.

Vincent nodded. "Okay." He put his hand on her shoulder. "Clarke, why don't you step down and take a seat and we'll get on with what we've been doing."

Timmons stepped off the stage, taking the character of Timmons Clarke with him. He walked it over to a chair and sat it down, crossing its legs with exacting casualness. His present Timmons Clarke was the all-American athlete, robustly healthy, slightly awkward in public, endearingly open. One of the television heroes inhaled noisily.

"How'd I do?" Timmons asked Mallorey in a loud whisper.

"All you did was introduce yourself," Mallorey answered. "How did it feel?"

Timmons thought for a moment. "Okay. What do we do now?"

"Just listen," Mallorey said, gesturing toward the couple who were about to present a scene.

Timmons settled himself into his chair with the air of a dutiful student and Mallorey turned her full attention on Vincent. The evening passed as it usually did, moments of concentration alternating with those dead times of instruction and thought to which Mallorey had quickly become accustomed.

"We going to do exercises?" a young woman asked.

"You want to do them, do them," Vincent answered. "If

you're going to act on television it might do you some good to learn how to be a tree."

"What's he talking about?" Timmons whispered.

"Shhh," Mallorey said, just as Vincent turned his attention toward them.

"Clarke," Vincent called. "Come on over here. I'd like you to try one of these."

"ME?" Timmons squeaked.

"Yeah, to try one of these . . ."

"I don't know how . . ."

"Shut up, Clarke," Vincent said. "Just listen, will ya?"

Timmons rose and ambled over to him. It was a short walk across the room but it seemed to take him forever.

"He's acting all the time," Mallorey marvelled to herself. "That walk is acting, and that protest was acting. When does he live?"

"Okay, Clarke, Marsha here's going to explain to you about these exercises. Marsha, take him over in the corner, would you, and in five minutes give him the whole story. You ever read Stanislavski, Clarke?" Timmons' expression remained blank. "I didn't think so. Okay, Marsha, take him."

Mallorey watched Timmons follow the young woman into the far gloom. He followed her like a puppy. Mallorey felt distaste growing in her. Timmons did everything, walked, talked, held himself, as if he was someone else, and the who of it was constantly shifting.

"What's the matter, Red?" Vincent asked.

"He's the matter," Mallorey said. "The way he is."

"Could be he's a born actor," Vincent said. "He's been trying on so many roles since he walked in tonight I can't pinpoint who the hell he really is. If he's anyone. He might also be one of those personalityless people who needs to act in order to know who they are. Or," Vincent hesitated, "he could just be a whore." Vincent looked toward the dark corner where Timmons was standing rigid, while Marsha

tried to explain to him about trying to be a rock or a tree or an animal. Timmons was listening politely, nodding his head at her words, but the set of his back and neck showed that he thought she was crazy.

"He might be a winner, God help us," Vincent said wearily. "If he could ever be trained to think and to understand what he's doing." He looked down at Mallorey. "When he starts to come along, I'll give you a love scene to do with him." Mallorey clenched her teeth and looked up at him. "Yeah," Vincent chuckled, "since you obviously can't stand him."

Vincent moved away. "Clarke!" he called, "let's get you started." Timmons came toward Vincent with an obvious expression of relief on his face.

"I want you to prepare a scene, Clarke. Don't worry about anything, technique, any of that stuff. Just study the scene and decide how you want to do it and we'll look at it in a week. Okay?" Timmons nodded.

"It's a scene from an old movie," Vincent said, gesturing largely, as if introducing Timmons to a lavish set. "It's a Charles Boyer role. You know who Charles Boyer was?"

"I think I've seen him on TV," Timmons said. "He was a leading man. Very romantic. With a French accent, kind of old-timey."

"Yeah," Vincent said agreeably, "that's it. This scene is from one of his biggest movies. It's called *Gaslight*. He played the villain in this one."

Timmons looked unhappy. "A villain? Is that a leading role?"

"Don't worry," Vincent said comfortingly, "it's a leading, romantic villain. You'll love it."

In her desperation Selena had tried to develop a passion. She had played tennis with compulsive regularity for a while. Then, feeling that she needed to be with people, she had taken the classic route of group therapy, hoping it would

serve a two-fold purpose: enlighten her about her emotions, and give her someone to talk to.

The group had proved frustrating. All the members were veterans of other therapies, other encounters, other marathons. They knew the rules of the game as a gambler knows the odds at a crap table and they played at it with frightening brio. The sessions were a nightmare for Selena. She was reduced to sitting and listening as the other participants exchanged jargon, using terms from every method of self-exploration currently in vogue, and a few fallen from repute.

Very quickly the other members of the group had turned on her. Her silence designated her as a victim and they were practiced at emotional lynching.

Finally, after a third session devoted to demolishing Selena, she simply walked out. "Come back here!" one raging man had screamed. "Don't you run away from the truth!" Selena had kept walking, feeling it unreasonable that she submit to their bruising when Timmons was already doing such a good job on her by himself.

From group therapy she had switched to yoga. The classes were held in an apartment at Bar Harbour and were led by a middle-aged woman of ferocious cheerfulness and determined spirituality. Selena admitted to herself that the yoga was worthwhile, that it felt good to practice the *asanas*, to feel the changes in her body, to relax the tensions. Timmons had taken to punching her with depressing regularity, being careful not to mark her where it would show. Her rib cage and upper arms were continually bruised now. She had to be careful not to wear anything more revealing than a t-shirt. The yoga teacher did not object when Selena chose to wear a sweatshirt during the lessons.

There came a point where the changes in her body, brought about by the yoga, began to effect her behavior. It was as if the muscular tensions, the gripped posture, were surrogates for emotional expression. Easing her body away from its

normal stance freed the anguish in her and she found herself crying for no reason at all or irritable and reckless when talking with Timmons.

"Your damn big mouth," Timmons would repeat, over and over again, as he punched her.

Abandoning the yoga, which she recognized as a threat to the stability of her life, Selena took up tap-dancing. The classes were held in the recreation lodge at Newport Mews. The sweat and determination needed to learn the steps, the deafening clatter of the tap shoes, served to deflect her attention from her life.

Timmons had begun complaining about their automobile. Unlike most couples living in the marina, the Clarkes had only one car. That meant that when one of them took the car the other was sentenced to immobility. Until now Selena had been privileged to use the car to go to work. Timmons decided that he was tired of being marooned for the entire day and demanded that Selena find another method of transportation.

It was difficult for here, as elsewhere in Southern California, people were not likely to admit strangers into their cars. Driving with someone was the first step to intimacy and to ask for a ride was almost like asking someone to allow you to share his bathroom. Necessity might force you to it but it made everyone uneasy.

Nevertheless, Selena managed to find someone who would drive her the ten miles to a bus stop where she could board one of the infrequent buses that would take her another ten miles to her work. The tiresome business ended several days later when Timmons returned the car to her, saying that he had reconsidered the question.

Selena did not wonder at his decision. She knew why he was being so thoughtful. The Mercedes and the Datsun 280-Z were the workhorses of the marina. A few, rich eccentrics had tricked themselves out with Excaliburs or Stutz Blackhawks, or even a Ferrari or two. There were no

Rolls-Royces: only Hollywood agents and rock stars drove them. However, there were twin brothers, owners of a large insurance agency, who drove twin custom-built Lancias. They were considered show-offs. Men who had loved auto shop in high school indulged themselves with a Cutlass or Trans-Am for their weekend cruising. A few of the younger residents, sons and daughters of the rich come to spend parent-approved years of sexual freedom before settling down to the serious business of life, had carefully renovated classic cars. Classic cars, in their limited understanding of the term, seemed to range from the 1948 Mercury to the 1957 Oldsmobile. Those jewels gleamed and thrummed on Saturday afternoons as the children acted out their parents' adolescent memories.

The Clarkes owned a Ford LTD. Timmons did not want to be seen behind the wheel of so staid a vehicle. Selena suggested they buy a pickup truck, intimating it might add a certain *cachet* to his image. He became very angry at her stupidity: trucks were grubby, even with ten coats of hand-rubbed lacquer; but he did not hit her for this time she had been making a serious effort to think about what would serve him.

His complaints continued for a while and then dwindled away into morose indifference. Timmons knew that Selena's earnings were just enough to keep them going from week to week. There was nothing extra, no cash, nor credit, left to allow them a more appropriate automobile. His rage was rekindled by the change at the Spire Club. Timmons became so desperate about the loss of the place he thought of as his office, his operating center, that he forgot to hit Selena. He took to megavitamin therapy, ingesting self-prescribed combinations of pills and powders in an attempt to armor himself against disease and aging and wearing effects of the air. It had come to him that they were surrounded by poison, by abrasive chemicals scrubbing at their lungs with every breath, with molds and drugs and mutated bacteria working

their evil with every swallow. Timmons began taking thousands of units of Vitamin C, Vitamin E, Thiomoline, Zinc. He gulped Vitamin B in all its complexities for his nerves, Vitamin K for his hair, Vitamin A for his skin and eyes, Vitamin D to go with vitamin A, magnesium, copper and other trace metals for whatever magic they might perform. He splurged on asparagus for his kidneys, linden tea for his digestion. He chewed parsley for his teeth and breath and for the iron it contained. He insisted on eating liver twice a week, seeing to it that Selena singed it lightly in a dry pan to seal in the blood, eating it still raw and running red on his plate. He foreswore fried foods and milk products and began mixing soybean concoctions to pour over peeled fruit. He forbade her to scrape vegetables. He made inordinate use of the blender. He did not feel different, yet, but reckoned that after so many years of self-destruction it might take a while to change his entire body chemistry.

A dark mole on one shoulder began to trouble him. It had not grown, it was simply that his eyes fastened on it one morning and he became anxious. He inspected the mole daily, touching it delicately at first and then, later, not touching it at all. The mole remained the same, innocuous in size, but it grew in his mind until, in a panic, he found a doctor to look at it. The doctor reassured him that there was nothing wrong. He offered to remove the small black dot if it would put Timmons' mind at ease.

"Will there be a scar?" Timmons asked.

"Well," the doctor said, "it'll leave a red mark but that'll fade, after a while."

"How long?" Timmons demanded.

The doctor shrugged, hiding his amazement at Timmons' nervousness. "Oh, a year, maybe. It'll be a small, pale spot."

"Will it tan?" Timmons asked. "I mean, will it ever be the same color as the rest of my skin?"

"Scars are always a little off," the doctor said impatient-

ly. "They don't take the sun. You destroy the melanin when you burn off a little thing like that."

Timmons placed a nervous forefinger next to the mole. "You're sure it's not. . . .dangerous?" He could not bring himself to use *that* word.

"No."

"Then," Timmons sighed, "I'll keep it."

The visit cost forty dollars they could ill afford and Timmons was not reassured. He took to standing with one hand cupped over his shoulder, the palm hovering over the mole, as if to protect it from the evil, invisible cosmic rays that might transform that vulnerable small spot into a fearful destroyer.

Selena began to drive around at night. She drove the streets of the marina and she drove the streets beyond the marina and then she took to driving north, back toward Los Angeles.

She began to wonder at how their lives had shrunk. It seemed to her that when they had lived in Los Angeles they had always gone places, had always been on the move. Now, since coming to the marina, they had found it easier to stay within that community. They had stopped reaching for new sights and experiences and people. They had wrapped themselves in the handy entertainments of King's Rest. The place was so self-contained, so full of services and merchandise to meet their immediate needs or whims that it had come to be an effort to need or want anything more.

Selena began to allow herself one outside splurge a week, one drink in a bar, one movie, one stroll through a bookstore, one ramble up the changing streets of Venice. She allowed herself conversations with strangers, no matter how short the exchange might be, and two second love affairs with passers-by on the street, their eyes meeting, holding and sliding away as they moved past each other. Selena knew that the emotions engendered by those instantaneous possessions were meaningless. Yet she needed them. They safely reassured her that she existed and that she was attractive.

Timmons sensed her growing independence and it annoyed him. He did not think of it as independence: he thought of it as impudence. Selena was silent now when he challenged her to express an opinion about him, about his career, about his acting lessons, about his schemes. She would respond by asking him what he thought, or what he felt. It had become infuriating.

“Don’t answer my question with a question,” he would shout, eager for her to cross him in some way so that he would have an excuse to hit her. His frustration grew as she became more elusive. He knew that she was slipping away from him in a way that seemed so subtle that he could not fight it.

One evening, after a particularly humiliating session at his acting class, he slouched grumpily into the apartment. Selena was seated on the floor, listening to the classical music he hated. Timmons stood watching her for a long moment, waiting for her to turn off the stereo as she usually did when he came home. This time Selena did not move.

“Turn off that crap,” he said loudly.

“Just a few minutes more,” Selena said, demanding patience with a wave of her hand.

“I can’t stand that shit!” Timmons screamed, stepping over her and jerking the cassette from the machine without bothering to turn it off first. The long plastic ribbon caught, held and then tore as he wrenched it out of its nest.

“Timmy,” Selena complained, “couldn’t you just let me finish this tape?” She had risen and taken the cassette from his hands.

Timmons punched her, immense satisfaction filling him as she staggered back.

Selena lay stunned, still clutching the cassette. She could feel blood rushing into her head, rage filling her. She growled softly. And then she grew deadly calm. She knew what she had to do now, and she wondered that she had not known it before. Selena picked up one of Timmons’ awards

that was standing in the corner with all the others, tombstones of his victories. It was a long, heavy brass cup with the figure of a runner soldered on top. She felt the weight of it and then grasped it in both hands, lifting it easily. Then, swinging the trophy like a baseball bat, shrieking a high, ululating war cry, Selena went after Timmons.

He fell back beneath the onslaught. Selena swung the trophy back and forth, now like a tennis racket, now like a golf club. Timmons' hands were up, protecting his face. He batted at Selena ineffectually, surprise turning his gestures girlish as he tried to ward her off.

The trophy connected, hitting him flush on the chest. He felt the breath go out of him and for a long moment could not inhale. He was choking on his own respiration, his diaphragm blocked and unable to move.

Selena swung the trophy at him again. It was a backhand stroke of some power and it caught him on the upper arm. He felt his side go numb.

“You dumb bitch!” he managed to gasp, retreating. “You’re going to ruin me!” The pain was starting now, and the fear and the fury. “What the hell is wrong with you?” he shouted. Timmons managed to reach the bathroom. He slammed the door, locking it against Selena’s attack.

“Don’t you ever touch me again!” Selena screamed through the closed door. “You hear me, Timmy?”

“What the hell’s got into you, Selena?” he bellowed back at her. There was silence now from the other side of the door. Timmons sat down on the toilet and tried to catch his breath. He ran his hands through his hair, trying to make it take on the attractive shape it had had before the fight. Then he got up, took off his shirt and examined himself in the mirror.

There was a bruise at the bottom of his sternum. He would not be able to wear his shirts unbuttoned as low as he liked. His arm was discolored, too. “Long sleeves in this weather,” he moaned to himself. He swallowed a handful of

vitamin C tablets, hoping they would speed the healing of his wounds.

"Are you calmed down?" Timmons called. There was no answer. He wondered if he might risk a sortie.

"Selena?" he called. There was still no answer. Timmons opened the bathroom door and looked out. Selena was seated in the living room, staring at the rug. He thought she had calmed down.

"Jeezus, Selena," Timmons said reproachfully, "you could have ruined me." He walked toward her, the fury inside him simmering, just waiting for a trigger. He stopped as she raised her eyes to look up at him.

"Don't you ever, ever hit me again," she said quietly. "I'm not kidding, Timmy. I'll kill you if you ever lay a hand on me again."

"Is there anything in the fridge?" Timmons asked, strolling into the kitchen. "I'm hungry."

"I don't know," Selena said wearily.

"Why don't you make me something to eat?" Timmons asked. "I'm starving."

It was as if nothing had happened, as if the fight had not occurred, as if Selena had made no threats. Timmons appeared to have wiped it from his mind.

"Do your own cooking," Selena snapped.

"Hell, Selena, I don't know how to cook," Timmons protested.

"Learn," she said. "I'm going to bed."

"I'll be right there," Timmons said jovially. "Don't go to sleep yet."

She heard him clashing dishes and pans. She heard the refrigerator door open and slam shut a half dozen times. She heard the clink of a knife and fork and then the squeak of the dishwasher door opening and closing. Timmons came strolling into the bedroom, patting his abdomen in a show of satisfaction.

"Nothing to it," he announced. "I don't know why women make such a fuss."

Selena lay on the far side of the bed, her back turned to him.

Timmons began to undress. He crawled beneath the covers and settled himself comfortably, pounding his pillow into shape. Selena could hear his fist hitting the pillow and she shuddered, knowing that it could as easily be her he was hitting.

"I think you better make up your mind," Selena said. "You can either have a boxing match or a marriage. It's up to you to decide."

"Forget it," Timmons said. And then he reached for her.

Selena warded him off. "Not tonight, Timmy. Not after that."

"Didn't it turn you on?" Timmons wheedled. "It really turned me on, babe."

"You're crazy," Selena shouted, pushing him away.

Something burst behind Timmons' eyes. The fury that had been waiting to explode found a reason to do so. Timmons' hands went around Selena's throat and he began to squeeze. He knew that he had done this before, choked a woman, but that had been somewhere else and he had not been as enraged as he was now. Selena fought him. She pounded at his face with her clenched fists. Timmons was too aroused to care. Selena's rage was turning to panic; she could not breathe. The trapped blood drummed in her head. She felt herself going blind, losing consciousness.

Timmons watched her fists uncurl and her head go slack. He released his grip on her throat and waited. He saw her move and then her chest expanded convulsively as she sucked in air. He waited longer and saw her breathing re-establish itself in a normal rhythm. The blood was roaring through his veins, under his skin, at his groin. He kept watching Selena's face and recognized the moment she

began to waken. He wanted her aware of what was going on but not yet able to react.

When he saw that spark, that tightening of her expression as she took possession of herself again, Timmons acted. He pried her knees apart, lifted her legs over his shoulders and forced himself into her, beating at her with the movement of his hips. He drew blood when he took her anally, one hand over her mouth now to prevent the screams from bothering him. She bit his fingers but he did not even feel it.

Timmons did not stop until he was tired and bored. He rolled away from her and sprawled over the width of the bed, watching disinterestedly as Selena staggered out of the room.

He felt slightly sick, as if he had defiled himself by the contact with her. "Piece of meat," he muttered to himself. "Her and all of them."

Timmons arranged himself on the bed, holding himself as far away from the stains on the sheet as he could. He turned off the light, sighed and fell into an exhausted sleep.

After that evening Selena tried to keep away from the apartment, although she knew she had no place to go. She was in a state of shock. She knew that if she spent too much time near Timmons she would either be completely paralyzed in his presence, or she would be moved to kill him.

On some mornings she would find a note in the kitchen informing her that they were invited out that night and that she was expected to accompany him.

On those evenings that Timmons took her out into the world they acted as if the marriage was intact. Selena continued to play the role she always had, smiling at the right moments, disappearing when Timmons latched on to a victim. She allowed him to hold her hand as a public display of unity. Timmons insisted on it, believing that their acquaintances would notice any change in their behavior. Timmons barely looked at her now. He would inspect her clothes to

assure himself that she was appropriately dressed but he made no comment, gave no compliment, asked no questions about her state of mind.

Selena returned to her automobile, to the late night driving, but she was more restless now. It was no longer enough for her to just wander aimlessly. She needed something more: a place to go, people to meet, friends to talk to.

One night, while cruising the outskirts of the marina, Selena saw David Nash. He was running, his expression withdrawn and concentrated, as if each footfall was an act of will. Selena slowed the car and called out to him. He trotted over to talk to her.

“You jogging?” she asked stupidly, unable to think of anything else to say. She had fallen out of the habit of conversation.

“Yes, jogging,” he said, continuing to run in place as he talked to her. She was leaning out the car window, her long blonde hair falling over the arm that supported her cheek. “I thought I’d go over and play some basketball,” he added. He seemed very proud of that.

“You play often?” she asked.

“Couple times a week, sometimes more.”

She shook her head in admiration. “You must be very disciplined.”

He nodded unhappily. It seemed to him that he was losing his self-discipline, becoming softer and scattered in his determination.

“You almost finished?” Selena asked, pointing vaguely at the street. “You sure you want to play basketball tonight?”

“Uh, why?” David asked, knowing how awkward that sounded. Selena was obviously inviting him to forget about his evening’s plans. He barely knew her, knew her only as Timmons’ wife: a healthy, silent animal whom he had taken for a mindless body. It came to him that she might be worthy of his attention.

"Just thought I'd like to go somewhere, and have some company along," Selena said. "I thought I'd like someone along whom I don't know too well. . . ."

"Oh, why?"

Selena shrugged. "I feel like talking and not necessarily telling the truth."

David smiled uneasily. He understood too well what she meant. Lately it had been a temptation for him, too, to go where he was not known and pretend to be someone else.

"Okay," he said, "why not? I'll have to change."

"Get in," Selena invited. "I'll drive you back to your place. Doges, isn't it?"

"Yes, Doges." He got into the car.

"I'll wait for you downstairs," Selena said easily. "I don't want to see your apartment."

"Why not?" David thought she might be skittish about coming up with him. She might be parrying his advances before they were even made.

"It would be too revealing," Selena said. "I don't want to find out who you are that way." She fell silent then. He watched her, seeing no expression on her face. She seemed to be concentrating on driving. It was reassuring: it made her seem uncomplicated.

"What are you wearing?" he asked suddenly, peering at her in the darkness of the front seat.

"Pretend we're going dancing," Selena said, "and that we change our mind."

David grinned. She could see his teeth gleaming in the tan of his face. It was not Timmons' theatrical smile but it had a hungry, wolfish quality to it. Selena shivered.

"Dancing, and we change our minds? I like that," David said. It came to him that she was crazy but he brushed away the fear and promised himself he would go along with this fantasy of Selena's. He was proud of his spontaneity, of his ability to pick up someone he barely knew and fall into her mood immediately. He promised himself that he would relax

tonight, that he would stay loose, that he would act as if he was at ease with everything that happened. He always hoped that the next woman would be the one to unlock his soul, would allow him to enjoy the moment wholeheartedly. He yearned to approach the limits of danger, knowing that he would always draw back. His definition of danger, and its limits, was very broad.

In his apartment, as he changed from his jogging clothes to a more suitable costume, he began to wonder if perhaps he was not being set up. Maybe Timmons had pushed Selena toward him. Maybe this was another attempt to buy his way into the new club. For a brief moment he felt flattered. Then David recalled the tension in Selena's face when she first spoke to him. He suddenly recognized it as wistfulness. That could not have been an act. "I wish I could read minds," he thought. The suspicions had spoiled his mood and he struggled to become spontaneous and accepting again.

He felt trapped by his habit of seeking the reasons behind every act, every word. Everything he saw, everything he heard, convinced him that he was missing out on the real joys of life. He had listened to many conversations in which people spoke about their struggle to achieve some enchanted state of being in which they would reflexively accept things as they came. Everyone seemed to be trying to attain some uncontrived state of bliss. David heard them as if he was listening to a foreign language he had studied but which he still had to translate, word for word. He knew, more or less, what the vocabulary meant but he could understand the emotions they talked about only by analogy.

"I'm a free spirit," David reminded himself. That phrase had become a magic formula, an incantation he used to summon forth the spirit of risk he knew must live within him.

"I'm safe," he reassured himself. "I'm safe so I can be a free spirit." He saw no contradiction in what he was telling himself.

"Here I am," he announced, getting back into Selena's car. He was wearing Pierre Cardin jeans, a chambray shirt from Christian Dior and a chamois leather jacket he had picked up at Paul Stuart on his last trip to New York.

Selena nodded in appreciation. He looked beautiful. Different than Timmons, of course. David's dark hair and skin attracted her. They seemed safe, almost innocent, after the blond violence she was used to. David was taller than Timmons. It made him seem more competent. For a moment Selena felt that she could lean against this man and feel secure in his bulk and height.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked.

"I'd like to go to a sleazy bar and be raucous."

"And get into a fight?" David asked warily.

"A fight? Oh, no!" Selena reflected. She definitely did not want anything violent.

"How about the most elegant restaurant we can find?" David said. "We can complain about the food and send the wine back." It seemed a perfect compromise to him, a comfortable place in which one could be odious.

"That's not it," Selena said, disappointed in his lack of imagination.

"Let's go to a disco, since we're dressed for it," he said. "We can sweat to music." David usually said "perspire," but, in this case, he thought the more vulgar word appropriate to Selena's mood.

"Okay, but nothing chic." She wondered how he danced, whether he was loose and challenging on the dance floor, or given to choreographing routines.

"There's Davy Jones Rocker," he suggested. "Full of people from Los Angeles who think they're seeing the real marina night life. We could take a look in there."

Selena nodded and pulled away from the curb. She would have preferred going farther away from the marina but did not feel sure enough of herself, or of David, to insist.

They parked in the packed lot and walked through the heavy beamed doors of the discotheque. The entryway looked cheap and temporary. They passed a box-office where David handed over an eight dollar entrance fee.

"Reminds me of kiddie matinees," he muttered. Selena smiled at him vaguely and kept walking. The lobby looked like a railroad waiting room. It was lined with baggage lockers. Evidently, the patrons were expected to check their valuables before going on into the main room. A small recess to one side held pinball machines that were flickering and clanging.

"Here we have the penny arcade," David announced, his voice taking on the sing-song intonations of a boardwalk barker. "Try your hand at a game of skill?"

"No, thanks," Selena said and turned to the stairs leading to the dancing and music. They climbed up into bedlam. There were the inevitable flashing lights, the transparent dance floor with neon underpinnings that dyed the dancers' legs blue and red and green. There were strobe lights in the corners, putting a strain on everyone's eyes, there was dry ice smoke puffing out from vents at the four corners of the dance floor. There was concentration-shattering music, full of yowlings and thumpings and indecipherable words except for the habitual punctuation of 'baby, baby, baby.' There were two bars surrounded by people with exploring eyes: men looking for victims, women looking for a heart's companion. And there were dancers. They bobbed and whirled and posed, they dipped and wiggled and sent their arms flying in the air in formal illustrations and jittery arabesques. There were dancers who moved like mimes and dancers who moved like robots, there were dancers who moved like musical comedy hoofers and dancers who moved like juvenile delinquents, there were dancers who moved like clods and dancers who moved like stars. They were uniformly expressionless.

"They don't seem to be having a very good time, do they?" David said into Selena's ear.

"Well, they are, and then they aren't," she said. "It's a power trip, just like everything else."

He looked at her strangely, his expression hidden and then revealed again by the rhythmic lights. "What does she know about power?" he wondered. "Or is she just cynical? And what made her that way?"

"Do you want to dance?" he invited.

Selena nodded. He took her hand and ushered her onto the dance floor. He was not shy about claiming a central position for them.

She found him an academic dancer. He must have taken lessons for he performed the steps by rote. He led very well and very obviously; she always knew where he wanted her to move. He held her perfectly when they danced in unison, his hand firm and guiding on her back, his fingers indicating the direction to take, his arm drawing her close. He was not afraid to try some intricate combinations, even though he lost her once or twice. He recovered quickly, reining her back into partnership with him. She noticed that he rarely turned her loose to move on her own. He always kept some sort of hold on her. There was no challenge in his dancing and when she dared to challenge him he did not reply but waited for her to finish the foolishness and come back to her senses and his direction. Selena was aware of the lack of sensuality in his dancing. She had always thrown herself into it, investing her energy, her heat, her sense of pleasure. She had always expected that dancing would produce a certain disarray, heightened emotions and warmed loins. If dancing could be said to have logic, then David danced logically. It was not even an athletic event to him, but a leisure activity he did well.

She knew that if she had been more herself she would have been disappointed but, instead, she felt reassured. He was

turning out to be uncomplicated, perhaps unimaginative. She wondered if he took to bed as he took to the dance floor.

"I'd like a drink," she told him. With no hesitation he led her from the dance floor and up to the bar. He made a place for them with an effortless insinuation of his body between two people. He did it so well that no one deemed themselves pushed or displaced.

"Something not really you?" he suggested. Selena nodded. David ordered two apricot sours. Selena smiled appreciatively. The bartender flicked a surprised look at David, caught something of the mood that held them and restrained his reaction. This was a scotch, vodka, beer crowd.

They clinked glasses before drinking. David downed the apricot sour in two swallows, put the glass back on the bar and said: "That's fairly disgusting."

Selena laughed and heard herself with surprise. It was the first time in a long while that she had laughed. "Ultimate sleaze," she said.

"Let's get out of here," David said. She followed him out as she had followed him on the dance floor.

"I'll drive," he offered and she handed him the keys. "It's my turn, now," David said. He stopped the car at a liquor store and returned with a large paper bag.

"What did you buy?" she asked.

"You'll see later." They drove away from the marina, up the coast. "Malibu?" she asked after they had passed Santa Monica.

"You'll see," He repeated and turned on the car radio. Selena moved to sit closer to David.

"I wish this was a convertible," Selena said. David smiled and nodded. "That would be just right, wouldn't it?" he agreed.

Selena felt a decade younger, as if she was back in high school, spending an evening with the handsomest boy in the class. She felt ridiculous for acting this way, yet she could not rid herself of the mood.

"Just do it," she told herself. It was too delicious, too comfortable, to fight. There had never been anything romantic about her adolescence. Relations with boys had been casual, matter of course. Everyone had been determined to be cool, to be slightly removed and competent, to rid themselves of behavior they thought of as tradition but which was really only propaganda.

This was the first moment of romance that Selena could remember, the first evening that fulfilled the criteria of a "date."

She began to feel a confused and delightful trepidation, a wonderful nervousness. This entire evening was a holiday for her, a vacation from the severe tensions of her real life, and David was turning out to be the perfect date.

"Here we are," David said as he drove the car off the road, emerging on a beach.

"Where are we?" Selena asked.

"Carrillo State Park," he answered. "There may be some people camping around here." He stopped the car. "You have a blanket?"

"Of course," Selena said. They stepped out of the car and onto the sand.

The beach was wide and perfectly dark. Selena could see the glint of the water, she could hear the ocean but could not tell exactly where the water line was.

"Get the blanket," David said. She heard him walking away from the car, the sand crunching faintly under his shoes. "Come on," he called out of the darkness. Selena opened the car trunk and grabbed up the blanket. "Where are you?" she called and then laughed nervously.

"Follow my voice," David said and slowly and dramatically began reciting *Jabborwocky*. She reached him on the word 'wabe.'

"You didn't go very far," she said, disappointed.

"Crazy doesn't mean stupid," he retorted.

"I haven't been out here in years," Selena said wistfully.

“Carrillo Beach?”

“No, just the beach. You live in Southern California and somehow, time passes and there are things to do, and you never just come out here. The weekends, well, the weekends I’m tired and Timmons. . . .” she stopped.

“No Timmons,” David said severely. “Not for the next couple of hours.”

“Help me with the blanket.”

They spread the blanket and Selena sat down. She removed her shoes and put them carefully at one corner, afraid she might lose them in the dark.

She heard a match being struck and then David was lighting thick household candles and sticking them in the sand.

“Wonderful!” Selena exclaimed. David congratulated himself on his imagination and foresight.

“Champagne,” he told her and proceeded to open the bottle. It gave him no trouble; he had long ago perfected the technique.

“Plastic glasses. Sorry about that but there was no crystal to be had at Jerry’s Liquors. They did have cheese and wheat biscuits, though.”

They drank, toasting each other, toasting the beach, toasting Jerry’s Liquors, disco dancing, Malibu in the distance, the moon that appeared now, the shining, watery path that led to China.

“What are you wearing under that?” David asked.

“Uh, underwear,” Selena said nervously.

“Uh, underwear is perfect,” David responded. “Let’s go for a swim.” He stood and quickly stripped off his clothes, stepping back into the darkness. He stood for a moment, a black silhouette against the gleaming water and then turned and sprinted down the beach. Selena swallowed the last of the champagne, stood, and took off her dress. She was wearing a lace bra and panties that she had put on more for moral than physical support. It covered her as adequately as any swimsuit.

She followed him into the water and found him waiting for her a short distance off shore. They swam, side by side. David kept looking back toward the beach, checking their position in the water. He knew how easy it was to lose one's way out here at night.

David was a strong swimmer. His arms sliced into the water perfectly, his legs barely breaking surface as he kicked. Selena followed him easily, years of training with Timmons having prepared her to match all but the most powerful champion swimmers. She wished there might be more laughter in this but the mood was so carefully balanced, so neatly delineated by fantasy and dream that it might have foundered on anything stronger than a sigh.

They agreed on the moment to leave the water. The air was cold and she shivered. She was afraid that David might put his arms around her under the guise of keeping her warm, but he did not. They ran toward the blanket and threw themselves on it.

"Eat something," David urged her. "It'll help keep you warm." Silent moments passed. They finished the bottle of champagne and then she heard David rummaging in the paper bag. "What are you looking for?" she demanded.

"Brandy. I bought some brandy, too."

He found the small bottle and poured a dollop of brandy into a clean glass. "Here. Drink it down."

Selena was warm again. She could feel the bra and panties drying in the night breeze, the lace stiffening scratchily against her skin from the salt water.

"You said you were tired on weekends," David said easily. "You work?"

"Yes. I'm a para-legal."

"Really?" He seemed surprised and pleased. He had never thought to ask her before. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Selena smiled wanly. "Why didn't you ask?" She knew that she had never been important to Timmons and his acquaintances. Her work had been a fiction to them, a hobby to

keep her busy. She thought, suddenly, that Timmons had missed a bet: he could have pimped his wife onto David Nash.

“Do you like it?”

“I like it, as far as it goes,” Selena said. “I was going to go to law school this year but it didn’t work out.”

“Ah.” David suddenly had a new view of Timmons and Selena’s marriage. “So that’s how it is.”

“That’s how it is,” Selena said shortly. “No real world, remember?” Her voice was tight.

“Are you happy where you are?” David insisted.

“It’ll do until,” Selena replied.

“Until what?” David prodded her.

“Until I find something better,” Selena said with forced casualness. She took another swallow of the brandy. It burned down her throat and into her stomach. The soothing heat followed it immediately, warming her even more.

“That’s something to think about,” David said seriously. “Why don’t you let me see what I can come up with?”

“Not now,” Selena begged him, hoping that he would not ruin the evening.

“Not now,” he agreed. “Forget about it.” There was a short silence and then he said: “Selena, listen, I have to take off these damn briefs. Don’t get the wrong idea, but they’re drying and they’ve gotten itchy. Okay? Turn your head.”

Selena closed her eyes. She heard him stand up. She heard him begin to pull down the briefs. She opened her eyes and deliberately looked up at him.

David hesitated, feeling foolish for a moment as he stood there with one foot in the air, his body crouched over. Then he no longer felt foolish. He was suddenly very aware of Selena. She had long, muscled legs. “Strangler’s legs,” he thought as he finished undressing. He wondered why he had never noticed her in that way before. Perhaps it was because she was overshadowed by her husband’s looks. Perhaps

because she was always so quiet and withdrawn, always moving a few steps behind Timmons, always standing just behind his arm. He could not imagine why she had allowed herself to be hidden like that. David took a few seconds to compliment himself on his good fortune. He had been right to go along with her tonight. "It pays off to be a free spirit," he thought. And then he kneeled on the sand.

"Take that off," he said.

Selena reached behind her to unhook the brassiere. David's arms went around her. He helped her, he hindered her. Their fingers became tangled in the simple hook holding the wisp of lace together. Then the brassiere was gone and the panties followed.

David lay beside Selena, caressing her face, caressing her body. There was a smudge on one thigh. He brushed it with his fingers and felt her wince. He heard her small gasp. Then he realized it was a bruise.

David hugged the girl to him and felt the triumph and excitement that always came over him when he had solved a mystery or unravelled a puzzle. He knew more about Timmons now. He saw the other side of that foolish, clown-like man and his ambitions. He saw all the weaknesses in the man's character, the depth of his hunger, the extent of his frustrations. The excitement of his discovery turned outwards, toward Selena. Before, it had been simply the opportunity, the nearness of her, the entire composition of the evening that had stirred him. Now it was more than that: it was the power inherent in knowing that moved him.

He kissed her feverishly. His hands became clever and inventive.

Selena felt cherished, gentled. She thought she had never known such tenderness. She responded to the difference, rather than to David himself. She needed to take the romance of the evening to its reasonable conclusion.

They made love then as if there was true passion guiding

them. Selena cried and trembled and gave herself over to David, while he did not disappoint her in his academic perfection.

Afterward she was appreciative in a removed and sensible way. David had been as correct on the sandy, rumpled blanket as he had been on the dance floor. They caressed and teased each other politely, Selena tenderly thankful that he had allowed her to act out the fantasy, whether he understood it or not; David allowing himself a moment of kindness and affection as repayment for the solution of the puzzle, and the minutes of pleasure they had shared.

David feared, for a moment, that Selena might cling to him longer than was comfortable, that she might make demands of him in the morning, or the next day, or sometime later in the week. He was relieved when, after a last embrace, she moved away from him and began to dress. He thought her sensible and mature, worthy of respect.

Selena felt herself released from the misery of the emotional paralysis that kept her tied to Timmons. The evening had served its purpose; she knew it would never be repeated.

They said goodby to each other in the car with a quick hug, loud, smacking kisses on both cheeks and farewell smiles in which each could see their earlier complicity fading away into amused affection.

XI

"All right," Peter called, "let's get the meeting started." His voice was loud, soaring over the private conversations, the bursts of laughter, the small, whispered seductions.

Fifteen people had gathered in a tiny conference room at the lodge. The lodge stood in the exact center of Newport Mews. It appeared to have been constructed of driftwood, rising crazily from an artificial knoll to tower like a child's gaudy dream of castaways and pirate castles, furnished with the accoutrements of adult fantasy: open hearths and grossly beamed ceilings, cozy bars and insinuations of sofas and easy chairs. There were rooms of quiet and areas of taped music, playrooms dedicated to electronic buzzers and the tinny, dinging sounds of intercepted blips on screens. There was a billiards room, all shadows and smoke, with Victorian lighting fixtures strung low over elaborate tables; their gilt-edged legs were lost in the gloom, their gambler's green tops worn in spots from over-use.

There was a sparsely stacked library, rarely used. There were meeting rooms that were used for cocktail parties, the only place where plastic surfaces were allowed to appear for what they were.

"I know this is only the second meeting of the *ad hoc* committee," Peter said, "but you people should have accomplished something by this time! You have to take the initiative!"

The fifteen people were divided, lopsidedly, between drinkers and dopers. Eight participants held glasses in their hands; the other seven had been seen to pass around the last

stub end of a joint. A fine tolerance was apparent: neither group thought to pass judgment on the other. Dina thought it boded well for their future cooperation.

"We're going to have to appoint committees if you people won't take individual responsibility," Peter said. Dina looked up at him, unfavorably impressed by the martinet sound of his voice.

"Now, who has access to a copying machine?" Peter asked.

A reluctant hand was raised.

"We'll get you a newsletter," Peter said. "You'll run off the copies. I think a ream of paper should do it."

"Who's going to pay for the paper?" the hand-raiser asked. "That stuff's expensive."

"Take it out of your assessment," Peter instructed. "Now, who wants to work with me and Dina on the newsletter?"

There was silence.

"How about you?" Peter asked, remembering to be cheerful. He pointed at a bearded, sharply-dressed man who seemed to be wavering between the two groups. He had not refused a toke on a joint when it was offered, yet he held a half-empty wineglass in his hand. "If I remember, you're in publicity?"

"I do that for a *living*," the bearded man said. "I'm trying to keep that separate from my real life. I mean: the typewriter's how I make money but this is where I *live*, can you dig it? I don't mix the two."

"But you have a skill we can use," Peter said cajolingly. "It would be a shame to waste it."

"No, no, get someone else," the bearded man said. "It's a life principle with me: I leave all that bullshit at television-city every afternoon and try not to think about it until the next morning."

"Is there anybody here who'd like to work on the newsletter with us?" Dina interrupted, trying to forestall a show of

irritability from Peter. It would not do for him to alienate these very shaky members of the *ad hoc* committee by letting them know that he held them in contempt. Peter expected everyone to be as passionately involved as he was. He assumed that people would snap to, would volunteer; Peter expected them to follow orders if they could not create plans of their own.

“Hey, I just don’t have the time,” a woman said.

“Not even five hours a week?” Peter asked.

“Well, hey, I mean, I just can’t *think* that far ahead, you know? Like whatever happens I got to be *available*, you know, man? I don’t particularly dig a *structured* life; I mean, I *had* that. Now I’m into the universal rhythm of happenstance. I mean, planning five consecutive hours, like that’s a big chunk out of my *life*, you know?”

“How about two and a half hours a day, twice a week,” Peter suggested, his voice tight.

“Well, hey, I’d have to make like a *commitment*, you know. Listen, when I make a commitment, it’s like a *commitment*. And I’m not into commitment right now. I mean, I’d have to like *be* there to do it, right?”

Peter nodded.

“Well, right now, where I’m coming from, man, is like I don’t make *any* commitment like for longer than two days from now.”

“Late twentieth century patois,” an older man said. He was in his early forties and looked upon as an outsider, made foreign by his age in a group where thirty-five was the far side of the sun.

“How about you?” Peter asked, immediately alienating the grammarian. “You can write, can’t you?”

“Yes, I can write. No, I don’t know if I want to. I’m too involved with other things right now.”

“I’m sure you could give five hours a week,” Peter said, dismissing the older man’s claim to previous plans.

“Peter? That’s your name?” the man said. Peter nodded.

"It's simply that I'm very involved with. . . ." His voice trailed off. Dina watched him glancing at the other members of the committee. His eyes were desperate and she realized that he was waiting for someone to interrupt him so that he would not have to supply details.

"Whatever you're doing," Dina said, "I'm sure you could find a little time. One evening a week? Choose your own hours. What's your name, anyway? Things have been so hectic my memory for names has just gone blooey."

"Silver. My name's Silver," he said.

"Mr. Silver," Dina said, wanting to put him at ease.

"No, just Silver." He seemed insulted. "Silver's my first name."

"Look, Silver, we really could use your help," Dina said, making it a plea.

"Well," he said grudgingly, "if you really need it, I'll help you out." Having said the words he smiled with satisfaction.

"You're not helping *us*," Peter said brusquely, "you're helping yourselves. After all, it's *your* apartments that are falling apart."

Dina looked at Peter in exasperation. It amazed her that a man who could be so sensitive to her own moods, her own thoughts, her own needs in bed, could be so obtuse in dealing with other people. It was almost as if he had granted her equality because he had chosen her: the virtue was in his choice of her, not in Dina's own merit. Too often, now, Dina had seen him treat others, people with whom he had no emotional ties, as if they were of no account. It dampened her respect for him, even though her physical ardor remained undiminished.

"Now, the next thing," Peter said. "We should think about recruiting more people. Not right now, but eventually. I'd like all of you to make lists of your neighbors, the ones you think would be willing to join with us in whatever action we decide on."

"Hey, guy," a man said aggressively, "we *are* going to vote on all this, aren't we?"

"Well, of course," Peter said with some exasperation. "It's simply that I've had experience with neighborhood action groups before. I know what works."

"Yeah, well, there's some of us here who have been *involved*, you know what I mean? A lot of us were in the movement." Having presented his *bona fides*, the man ran his hand over his carefully styled hair, as if to reassure himself that the blow-dry had not disintegrated.

"Then you know what's needed," Peter said quickly. "You know how much work it takes."

"Lots of work," the aggressive man agreed, "and you get very little change after all that work. Now what you've got here is a monolithic corporate structure that's interested in the bottom line, not in the welfare of the people."

"Are we going to start that shit?" a woman demanded. "Because if we're going to get into that political shit, I don't want any part of it. All I want is to get my apartment repaired. I don't want to hear any of that capitalist system shit."

"Well, that's what we've got here," the aggressive man said.

"What we have here, in a *real-politik* sense," Peter broke in, "is a situation in which some fairly simple, well-publicized action could bring about the changes we want. Do you think the marina's owners will like us screwing up the image they've created? They make their profits from that image. And you're right: it's the bottom line that counts with them. So: threaten their profits and they'll eventually give in."

"What kind of action?" a woman asked.

"Public petitions, rent strike if necessary, demonstrations."

"I did demonstrations," the aggressive man said again. "I been CS gassed and thumped and tossed in a wagon and I've been jailed and processed and threatened and beat up. I been

dragged in front of the TV cameras and I been dragged out behind the sheriff's station. I been we-shall-overcomed to death, man. Scratch that demonstration idea. I don't want no more of that. You want us to withhold rent, okay. All they can do is evict us."

"Not if the rent is put into an escrow account," Peter broke in. "I'm here to handle the legal end of this. I'll be telling you what we can do and what we can't do, and how far we can stretch the law."

"Listen, guy," the movement man said, "if this was ten years ago I'd say blow up the place, just to get their attention, you know? But this is now and I don't know about all you other people, but I'm *tired*. So, you want to stretch the law, you better figure it out to the millimeter, guy, because I got no intention of being on the eleven o'clock news no more."

"I have to say something," a young woman said, standing. "My name's Sandy and I can't tell you how tense this is making me. There's so much hostility here it's scaring me. I mean, I'm withdrawing. I've worked so hard to learn to be open and just a few minutes here and I'm withdrawing again. There's all these power trips going on, and playing big chief, and it just makes my skin crawl. Why can't we all try to work with each other and kind of try to sense what the other person is feeling instead of trying to dictate each other's behavior with everybody doing his own number? I'll start it off, if nobody else wants to."

She waited a moment for someone to respond. Nobody did.

"Well, okay, if you want me to start off, I will," she repeated. "Peter you're trying to play big chief with us, using your supposedly superior knowledge of the law. But I didn't think that's what this group was going to be about. I thought we were going to get together and cooperate with each other. We've all agreed that there's a problem to be solved and I took it for granted that we'd get a general consensus on how to go about solving it and then we'd do it. I

mean, cooperative effort is maybe slower, but it gets the job done in a way that makes the rewards greater than just solving the problem, if you see what I mean? I think we should be *supportive* of each other instead of playing power games."

Peter turned his back on her and walked to the other side of the room.

"Now that's what I mean," Sandy said. "It doesn't help to have a negative attitude. And it's like an infantile game you're playing, like if we can't do it your way, you don't want to play."

Peter turned on her. "You want me to be open? Okay, I'll be open. Sandy: go sit down and shut up; you're bugging the shit out of me."

Sandy flushed and sat down. "You don't have to be so hostile," she said, bursting into tears.

One of the dopers lit a joint. In the sudden quiet after Peter's outburst everybody could hear the indrawn, hissing noise, like a steam radiator with the hiccups.

"Do you think you could wait until after the meeting?" Peter asked the doper.

"For sure," he said, carefully flicking the glowing end of the joint into an ashtray and tucking the ragged cylinder into his shirt pocket. "I'm all ears," he said and then began to laugh, fingering his ears frantically "*Dumbo!*" he giggled. "First movie-movie I ever saw."

"Mine was *Seven Brides For Seven Brothers*," a woman said brightly.

"Okay!" Peter said with forced enthusiasm. "Here's what we have so far. We've got Silver," he nodded at the man, "going to work with Dina," he nodded at her, "and me on the newsletter. And we've got a copying machine." He nodded at the unhappy volunteer. "I think we should concentrate on publicity and recruiting for the next week. Would you all be ready to give reports on your activities when we meet?"

There were grumbled assents from a few of the *ad hoc*

committee members. Most of them remained silent.

"Any suggestions you might have will be welcomed," Peter said. It sounded, to Dina's ears, like a pep talk. "You know where Dina lives; just drop them off at her apartment. Any information about the adversary that you can come up with will be of great help."

"I saw him once," a young woman said thoughtfully. "He looks like a gangster."

"Subjective impressions are always helpful," Peter said kindly. "But we need hard facts, when it comes right down to it."

"He reminded me of my uncle Simmy," the young woman continued.

"Okay, somebody have something to add?" Peter said, ignoring the young woman's family reminiscences.

There were head shakings and grunted negatives.

"Somebody want to move we adjourn?" Peter asked.

"I didn't know we were following Robert's Rules of Order," Silver commented. "But, better late than never: I so move."

"Second," Dina said.

"Moved and seconded," Peter said quickly. "All in favor?"

There was a ragged chorus of 'ayes.'

"Okay, meeting's over," Peter said, his voice truly cheerful at last.

Chairs scraped against the floor. The doper relit his joint. More wine was poured from almost empty bottles. A few people left.

"Too bad to break this up," Silver said to a few people standing near him. "Why don't we all go over to my place for a while?" His eyes still held a desperate look. The inviting smile moved tremblingly over his mouth, not quite at home there. The people who would have been his guests found that they had other things to do.

"Uncle Simmy did time," the young woman said to Peter.

"Really?" he said politely. "A lot of good people have done time."

"Uncle Simmy wasn't good," she said musingly. "He was a crook."

Peter looked imploringly toward Dina. She smiled meanly at him. She was not about to help him; let Peter get out of the conversation on his own.

It seemed to Dina that her anger, her plan to harass King's Rest into taking some action, her dream of eventual triumph, had been usurped. It had become Peter's plan, more complicated than she had wished at the beginning. The committee had, somehow, trivialized what, to her, had become so important. She resented their attitude, their laziness, their uncaring. She resented their private little worlds that made each of them react so stupidly to the demands of the plan. It was all being taken away from her. If it worked out, if she won, the triumph would not be hers. She wondered how she had allowed it to get away from her. She wondered if Peter had chosen her simply because she had a cause. Maybe his passion for her was based on the possibilities for contention.

"He's screwing me for my lawsuit," Dina thought.

Peter walked toward her, a disgusted expression on his face.

"You hear that?" Peter asked. "Her uncle did time. She seemed almost proud of him."

"Oh, I don't think so," Dina said. "It was more like. . . ." She could not define what the young woman's attitude had been and shook her head in exasperation.

"You know," Peter said, "you always feel that there's nothing to work with, that they're stupid beyond belief. It's amazing what you can get out of them with a little work. Don't worry; they'll wind up doing what has to be done. I'll even have what's-his-name demonstrating again."

"Oh, Peter," Dina said and put her arms around him.

"I bet you thought it didn't go well," Peter teased her, his eyes gleaming. "Well, it went terrific!" His arms were around her now and he was pulling her tight against his body, surreptitiously grinding his pelvis against her.

"Let's go to your place," he whispered, his breath hot against her ear. His hips moved again. "We have to celebrate."

"Can't we just make love?" Dina asked. "I don't feel like celebrating."

Mallorey had warned Consuelo two days ahead of time. Joshua was coming out of the hospital, his health precarious, his spirit eager and aggressive again.

"Get rid of Timmons," Mallorey said. "Joshua won't stand for it."

"Leave me alone," Consuelo whined. "He just hangs around. There's nothing going on."

Mallorey swore and hung up the telephone. She went through the marina's men's shops, buying new clothes for Joshua. He had lost weight in the hospital and not one of his hundred shirts or sixty pairs of trousers would fit him.

"Here we are," Mallorey said, throwing the packages on the hospital bed. Joshua was sitting near the window, his hands folded in his lap. She could see the rough patch on the blanket over his knees. At the beginning, when he had been so terribly weak, she had seen him picking at it.

"What did you bring me?" he asked.

"Off the rack, but expensive," Mallorey laughed. "You owe me eight hundred dollars."

"A pittance," Joshua said grandly. "Let's have a fashion show."

Mallorey unpacked the boxes, draping the shirts, the trousers, the foulard ascots, the sport jackets over her arms, holding them up for display.

"And," she said nervously, "the finishing touch."

She handed him a long, thin package. "Here, you devil,"

she said brightly. Joshua unwrapped the package and sat, shocked, holding the ebony cane. "The pommel is hand-carved silver," Mallorey said. "Pretty flashy, don't you think?"

She prayed he would take it well, would admit to himself that he needed the cane to help him walk. She hoped he would admire the beauty of the cane, the beauty that camouflaged its purpose. Joshua still had not said anything.

"Evil, isn't it," Mallorey added.

There were tears in his eyes. "Damn," he said quietly. It was a sad perjorative but, with that one word, Joshua accepted reality.

"James Mason in *The Seventh Veil*," Mallorey cajoled him. "Sexy as hell."

Joshua looked at the intricately chiseled pommel. "This must have cost you a fortune," he commented. "Old, isn't it?"

"Turn of the century, and never mind how much it cost. It's a graduation present to you." Mallorey could have cried with relief. Joshua had made no fuss beyond that one, desperate word.

"Stand up," she ordered. "Let's see how you look."

Joshua pushed himself up out of the chair, leaning on the cane. It was just the right length for him and she blessed the accuracy of her guess. Joshua stood, the cane firmly in his hand, his body held upright. He played with the cane, twirling it in the air, leaning against it casually, tossing and catching it briskly in a hand suddenly come back to strength.

"You're going to titillate all the dollies with that," Mallorey laughed. It did give him a satanic air, adding to the already dangerous appearance. "You should have done that long ago," Mallorey mused. "It would have turned all the ladies to mush." She smiled at him. "You look as if you would use it on some twitchy backsides."

"You're getting raunchy in your old age," Joshua said.

"Makes me wonder if we didn't miss a bet, those times we. . . ."

"No," Mallorey stopped him. "Past history is past history."

"Come here," Joshua ordered. "I want to say thank you."

Mallorey sauntered toward him, swaying her hips in a parody of provocation.

"Red-headed bitch," Joshua muttered and pulled her toward him. She could feel the cane pressing against the small of her back. Joshua kissed her thoroughly and then held her in an affectionate embrace.

"I can't thank you enough," Joshua whispered. "Staying with me, talking me out of giving it all up."

Mallorey pulled his face close, holding his head in her hands. "You're my best friend," she said tenderly. "You've done the same for me."

"Not like that," he said. "Not anywhere as much as you've done."

"Joshua," Mallorey said sweetly.

"Yes, my love," he answered, kissing her noisily on the ear.

"Get dressed!"

"Choose for me," he asked. "I'm not quite up to it yet."

She dressed him in black and white. His hair had turned completely gray during these last weeks. The natural tan had been maintained by a persistent use of a sunlamp. Finally he stood ready, costumed for his first entrance into the world. He gleamed. A cynical smile touched his lips.

"My God, Josh!" Mallorey gasped. "You look fantastic!" She could not go on. She was looking at a new man. Joshua had grown into the elder version of his reputation: vivid, evil and seductive.

Mallorey packed his clothes while Joshua stood quietly, his gaze turned inward. She wondered what he was thinking

until she saw him walk over and look at himself in the mirror. She saw him moving his body inside the clothes, adjusting his posture to accommodate the cane.

“Working on your attitude, are you?” Mallorey teased.

Joshua smiled at her. It was a new kind of smile for him, one she had never seen before. It made her shiver. Mallorey telephoned the business office. A nurse arrived, pushing a wheelchair. Joshua gave the nurse one of his famous sexual stares, completely ignoring the fact that the woman had seen him naked, helpless and messy. The nurse giggled uncontrollably.

“You’ve been wonderful,” Joshua told her. “The whole thing was worth it just to meet you.” The nurse blushed. Joshua arranged himself in the wheelchair. Mallorey could not help but notice that he patted the nurse’s derrière as she leaned over to adjust the foot rests. The nurse straightened, her face flushed and delighted.

“Dirty old man,” Mallorey muttered.

“Walk beside me, my dear,” Joshua invited.

“Okay, but keep your hands to yourself. There are reporters and photographers waiting for you.”

“What do they want?” Joshua asked in feigned surprise.

Mallorey made an obscene gesture, and Joshua nodded and turned to the nurse. “My dear,” he said to her, “I know the hospital rules demand that I ride out of here but we are going to bend the rules just a bit.”

The nurse began to protest but Joshua stopped her with a soothing hand on her waist. “You may push me just as far as the front door but I will walk out on my own steam. Do you understand? I can’t let those bastards see me in a wheelchair.”

“Oh, I can’t,” the nurse said. Joshua tightened his grip on her waist and she capitulated. “If anybody finds out,” she said, “I’ll be in terrible trouble.”

“Who will tell them?” Joshua asked.

They were met at the front door by hospital staff. Everyone wanted to catch a glimpse of Joshua in his role of movie star after having seen him as a patient. Somehow, with his lecherous, cantankerous, impossible behavior, he had fulfilled their fantasies of who he was. They loved him.

Joshua stood carefully. Those nearest him moved to help but he waved them away. "Tonight," he said dramatically, "I think it will be a twenty-year-old. Blonde." He gazed at a young nurse standing at the edge of the crowd. "Will you join me?" he asked.

The nurse grinned with embarrassment, shook her head and tried to hide. "Well," Joshua said, shrugging carefully, "I asked. It's your loss." He hefted the cane, settled it at a jaunty angle in his hand and said: "Mallorey?"

She opened the door for him and he moved out of the lobby and into the sunshine. The sun struck his hair and it blazed silver. The photographers jostled and stepped on each other's toes trying to find the right camera angle. The reporters shouted his name. A man with a microphone approached him, followed by another man holding a portable television camera.

"Mr. Quick, Mr. Quick," the man said, shoving the microphone at Joshua's chin. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Joshua said laconically, automatically turning his best side toward the camera.

"What are your plans now?" the reporter went on. His voice and demeanor reeked of self-importance.

"I've been locked in there for several weeks without a chance to partake of my favorite dish," Joshua said airily. He twirled the cane nonchalantly, almost hitting the reporter. "What do you think I'm planning to do?"

There was a burst of sycophantic laughter from the assembled reporters.

Mallorey held back, allowing Joshua to play the scene as he liked. "And Miss Swann?" the reporter insisted.

Mallorey moved up and put her arm through Joshua's. She looked up at him with an amused expression.

"Miss Swann and I are just good friends," Joshua said in a lying tone. Mallorey dutifully pasted an adoring expression on her face and gaped at Joshua.

"What about Mrs. Quick?" somebody called.

"Who?" Joshua asked, bored.

There was dirty, raucous laughter at that.

Joshua smiled warmly at the television reporter. "Do you always go about with full make-up on, mate?" he asked the man. "You look like a bloody fairy."

The microphone was pulled away.

"Thank you, gentlemen," Joshua dismissed them.

"The car's at the curb," Mallorey said. She had hired a limousine for Joshua's coming-out. It stood, black and bulky, at the curb, the uniformed chauffeur standing stiffly at attention, holding the door open. He was, of course, an unemployed actor.

They pulled away from the medical center with reporters still leaning in the windows, shouting questions at Joshua while photographers tried for one last shot. Joshua held Mallorey's hand until they were well away. Then he rested the cane in a corner of the back seat, leaned his head against Mallorey's shoulder and fell asleep. She had to wake him when they reached the marina..

Consuelo greeted her husband with a searching look and an offhand 'hello.' "Lunch is ready," she said, gesturing awkwardly toward the table set on the foredeck.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" Joshua asked. "I've been away for weeks."

Consuelo placed a kiss on his cheek, holding her body well away from him. Joshua sniffed at her. She smelled of whiskey.

"Did the doctors tell you what I can eat and what I can't?" Joshua asked her.

"Yes," Consuelo said sullenly. "Nothing constipating."

"Romantic, very romantic," Joshua snarled. He left the two women then and walked the length of *Moorea Cloud*, trying to retrieve a feeling of home. "I've missed this," he said. "She is a beautiful bitch, isn't she?"

"Let's eat," Consuelo said. She was holding a glass of wine in one hand.

"Sancerre, I trust?" Joshua asked lightly, nodding at the glass.

"Yes. You taught me it goes with shellfish."

They sat at the table that had been decorated as if for a party. The silver gleamed. The glasses were crystal, the china Limoges.

"Putting on the dog," Joshua commented.

"I thought, just this first day," Consuelo said. She was more nervous that she would have liked and refilled her glass almost immediately.

Manny passed the platter of lobster, stopping longer than needed at Joshua's side until he was recognized and greeted.

For a long while there was no sound but the cracking of lobster shells and the appreciative sounds of appetites being appeased. Joshua sipped carefully at the half glass of wine allowed him.

"Well," he said finally, dabbling his hands in a finger bowl, "what's the situation?"

"You're home. They delivered all the medication you'll need. I've moved out of the master's cabin. That's it," Consuelo said.

"Are you still screwing that half-wit jock?" Joshua inquired.

Consuelo angrily poured herself another glass of wine. "He's no half-wit," she said.

"God help you," Joshua breathed.

"Don't get excited," Mallorey warned him.

"He's no half-wit," Joshua exclaimed, "but my half-wit

wife doesn't even have the grace to deny that she's carrying on with him. No class, my dear; no class at all."

Consuelo shrugged and drank down the wine in one swallow. Joshua raised an eyebrow and looked questioningly at Mallorey, who nodded.

"He can't be doing you much good if you've taken to drinking like that," Joshua said softly.

"He's doing just fine," Consuelo said stubbornly. "More than you can do, anyway."

Joshua went pale. The tan suddenly looked like pancake makeup covering his shock. "I'm sorry it's been such a rough time for you," he said quietly. There was a dangerous note in his voice. "But you made a deal. You knew when I became ill that there was an end to. . . ." He stopped. A proud, stubborn expression came to his face. Joshua Quick did not need to apologize to anyone.

"We shouldn't be talking about this in front of Mallorey," he said calmly. "We'll discuss it later. I'm going to lie down now."

Joshua rose from the table, leaning heavily on the cane. "No, don't help me," he said to Mallorey. "I can make it down to my cabin."

"This came for you," Consuelo said sullenly, drawing an envelope from her pocket and handing it to him.

He gestured to Mallorey and she opened the envelope. Inside was a gold card, a life-time honorary membership in the Spire Club.

"Isn't that nice," Mallorey said.

"Public relations," Joshua sneered. "I'll add it to the drawerful of membership cards and diplomas and attestations and keys to the city I've been given over the many long years."

"Timmons would give his eyeteeth for one of those," Consuelo said unthinkingly.

Joshua walked toward the midships cabin, hesitated, and

then turned to his wife. "That could be arranged," he said bitterly. "His eyeteeth and his kneecaps." He opened the door and stepped inside before continuing. "It's not your screwing around that I object to," he called out. "It's the public way you go about it." Then he disappeared into the depths of *Moorea Cloud*.

The membership drive had come to a standstill. It was either the amount of the membership fee, or the distance from Los Angeles that was to blame. Or maybe it was the style and manner of the new club manager.

David had been shocked when he first met Gus Rhine. The man could have been Denny Brock's brother. He was short, dark and unappetizing in appearance. There was no grace to him, no ease, no tact. His voice was harsh, the intonation vulgar and he was often heard shouting from behind the closed doors of the club manager's office. He smoked cigars while he worked and the odor of used tobacco hung about him like a shroud. His clothes were correct in intention but fitted badly, accentuating his paunch, his bulky, narrow shoulders and broad buttocks.

"He looks like a stevedore," Viveca sniffed.

"He ran an exclusive club in Kentucky," David said weakly, equally appalled. He had not yet found time to check on the Kentucky club from where Gus Rhine was reported to have come.

"I bet he pinches the waitresses," Viveca had said drily, her mind made up about the man.

In the weeks that followed Gus Rhine made changes in the Spire Club, but not for the better. All the unemployed actors were removed from the restaurants and the entire service staff was now female. Service in the Spa and at the sports facilities continued to deteriorate. The tennis pro shop lost one of its salesmen and was no longer open until late at night.

The drinks at the Neptune Bar became weaker. David tried

to talk to Rhine about these changes but the man sluffed him off with a short lecture on profit margins and fiscal responsibility. He left David feeling like a fool.

"What we need," Brock said to David one morning, "is a gimmick." David sat very still although he was shuddering inside. He saw his retreat, his privacy, invaded by marching bands and majorettes.

"What sort of gimmick?" he asked carefully.

"Something classy." Brock was fiddling with papers on his desk, indicating that he was too busy to bother about details. David knew that he was about to be stuck with the job of finding a gimmick.

"You want me to think about it?" David offered, preferring to make it a favor rather than be subject to an order.

"Would you do that?" Brock looked relieved but David did not trust him. David knew that, one way or the other, he would have wound up doing it anyway.

"I'll give it some thought," he said noncommittally. "Maybe I can come up with the right person to handle it for you, too."

"For us, Dave, for us," Brock said pleasantly. It sounded threatening.

David nodded and left. He knew that if he did not find a person to handle this the problem would be irrevocably turned over to him. Any failure would be blamed on him; success would be judged to be inherent in the character of the Spire Club itself. There was no way he could win.

"Have you had any experience with problems such as we've been having here?" David asked Rhine. He had tracked the man down, finding him sitting alone at the pool-side bar. The bar was now open only at lunchtime and the incipient alcoholic matrons were forced to do their public drinking between noon and two. They had begun to be sober in the late afternoon and, for the first time in years, had begun greeting and talking to their husbands when they came home

from work without the benefit of anaesthesia. The resulting strain was visible in several marriages.

"Yeah, I've handled places like this before," Rhine said. He seemed to be hiding something and, at the same time, letting David know that there was a secret. David had become very angry at the unspoken undercurrents he had sensed since the Spire Club had changed its status.

"How was it handled, the membership problem, I mean?" David insisted.

"Oh, there's any number of ways. Television and radio commercials." David tried to interrupt the man but Rhine continued, "That's not what you're going for here," he said. "You need something better, that'll pull a better class of people." David subsided. "Or you can do some big charity number. Rich people feel real comfortable coming out for a charity affair. You can do a tournament, like your first annual golf classic. You know. You get good publicity on that, it's your hook, and then the money comes in behind it."

"I see what you mean," David said. He rose. "I'll give it some thought."

Alone in his office, David began to mull over what Rhine had said.

"A golf tournament? We have no golf course," David said aloud. For a moment, he felt very happy. That had been one bet Denny Brock had missed.

"A regatta? No, that limits it to people who are already here, or from up and down the coast at Balboa Bay Club or Newport or King's Harbor or Marina del Rey. What we want is people who want to play here but don't have anything to do with boats."

It came to him then. "Tennis," he said aloud. "A celebrity tennis tournament. No, that's not it. A charity tennis tournament with celebrities taking part in it."

He picked up the telephone and then put it down again. His heart was pounding at his own cleverness. "Who? Whose name on it?"

The answer was obvious. "Joshua Quick!" David chor-
tled. "For the Heart Fund." He thought about that for a
while, realizing that Denny Brock would never go for it.
David was beginning to understand Brock better.

"The Joshua Quick Heart Research Foundation," David
said to himself. "Denny Brock, chairman."

He became frightened. He felt as if he had been standing at
one end of a teetering rope bridge, the other end of which was
hidden by fog. The idea of the foundation, the idea of Denny
Brock, chairman, had moved him halfway across the bridge.
He had a hint of what was at the other end, but still he could
not see it. He was afraid it might be an executioner.

"Denny?" David said on the telephone. He could not
remember having punched Brock's number. "I have the
beginning of an idea." David recited his idea. There was a
brief silence on the other end and then Denny began to laugh.

"Dave, you always manage to amaze me," Brock said.
"Sometimes I underestimate you and then you come up with
a gimmick like this. It's perfect, Dave, perfect. Now: who
talks to Quick?"

There was a short silence while David weighed the pos-
sibilities. He would have preferred if Denny talked to Joshua
himself. But with his brief knowledge of Joshua Quick he
sensed that Brock would ruin it, if only by his diction.

"Maybe I'd better approach him," David said reluctantly.

"Is he well enough to do promotion?" Brock asked.

David was surprised. He had not known that Brock was a
Joshua Quick fan, or that he kept track of such information.

"I don't know. We'll have to find out. Maybe we could
have another spokesman."

"You mean Quick is the front and someone else does the
promotion?" Brock asked quickly.

"Yes." He smiled cynically. "How about Sonny De-
Lane?"

"How much will he cost us?" Brock asked immediately.

"I don't know. It's just an idea."

"That's okay for the old crocks," Brock said. "You need something to pull in your younger crowd. There's a lot of money in your younger crowd."

David began to laugh. Things were falling into place with an almost pre-determined ease. Brock waited quietly until David finished laughing.

"Timmons Clarke," David gasped. "Timmons Clarke!" he repeated, gulping for air.

"What's so funny?" Brock demanded.

"I couldn't begin to explain it," David said. He knew, suddenly, that this was the biggest scheme yet, the most complicated manipulation of his life. Everything he had done before had been limited to numbers and laws, constructions of puzzles complex enough to discourage all but the most serious investors. The pieces of the puzzles had been multi-dimensional, the surface hiding future maneuverings beneath a matter-of-fact glaze of verbiage. But those labyrinths had been built on paper, with words. Now, for the first time, he was about to manipulate real people directly, not just clauses and statements of intention. He sensed that if he could pull it off it would be a step forward for him, an advance into a world of more interesting, more exciting, more financially rewarding possibilities.

"How much will he cost?" Brock demanded.

"I don't know that either," David said. "I'll try to keep it to a minimum." He thought to himself that Timmons might do it for the exposure and a token fee. Another idea was coming to David, filling out the spaces nicely, giving balance to the still-awkward equation he was inventing. "We might hire his wife on a full-time basis. For a decent salary. Leave him free to do the glamour stuff, the promotion, while she does the real work."

"How much?" Brock repeated. David thought that Denny was being absurdly timid about spending money, right at the beginning of a project of this size and possibility, but, knowing the man, that was only to be expected. He felt his

contempt for the marina's owner flaring up again.

"You have to invest a little to get a favorable return," David lectured. "Probably about seventeen-fifty a month for her."

"We don't want to spend too much money," Brock warned him. "There won't be enough left when the tournament's over if all your money goes for expenses."

"Your money," David reminded him. He was gratified that Brock was taking the charity aspects of the tournament so seriously. "Don't worry," he said. "I'll work something out with all of them."

"Do it," Brock said. "It sounds real good. We'll talk about a global budget once you get their agreement."

"Fine," David said.

"And, listen, Dave," Brock said, lowering his voice as if discussing a secret, "if this works out there'll be a nice little something in it for you, just as a token of my appreciation. You'll participate. Understand?"

"We'll talk about that later, too," David told him, full of new self-assurance. At the same time he wondered about the word Brock had used. Participation. How could one participate in the profits of a project in which there were not supposed to be any profits?

David hung up the telephone and wandered out to the reception area. A new secretary sat at the desk, the fifth in as many months. None of the girls had worked out. None of them had had Dina's ability, her intelligence, her empathy.

"Maybe I shouldn't have fired her," David thought with chagrin. Then he controlled himself. He had received disturbing reports from friends in various state agencies. Peter had been busy. The Newport Mews committee had grown in size and vociferousness. There had been a meeting in the Newport Mews lodge. Over two hundred people had shown up. Yet David could not budge Denny Brock. The man refused to consider that there was a danger there.

"How do I get to Joshua?" David wondered, not wanting to think about Newport Mews. He was filled with a sly joy as the answer came to him. "Through Mallorey." He was nervous now, his survival instincts telling him, as they had so often lately, that something was very wrong. The membership drive was another bit of cement in the suspicious edifice being built by Denny Brock. On the surface it did not look wrong, but the character of the men Gus Rhine had brought with him and who now occupied the small office off the mezzanine was troubling. David knew that his latest idea, the tennis tournament, was another element for Brock's use. "Or mis-use," David thought, and suppressed the momentary doubt.

"Mallorey," David thought. "I've got to get her to work on Joshua." And he took his desires even further. "Maybe I can convince her to work on the tournament, too, on a committee." She would be with him every day. He would make his office the headquarters for the charity tournament, and she would be forced to be with him, watching him work, watching him control pieces of other people's lives. And he would watch her live. He would have time, and the opportunity, to break through the uncaring facade she had erected. As Mallorey had become more remote, unreachable, so David had become more obsessed. She had become a cause and a goal, a hold-out against his manipulations, a trophy to strive for. He hoped to distract her attention away from Joshua, for just a few hours each day. Later, after a series of maneuvers that he had not yet defined but the style of which he sensed, he would capture her entire attention. He would comfort her after Joshua's death. Better yet, he would use the contrast of his health against Joshua's illness to finally seduce her. He could not imagine anyone preferring to be near a dying man, no matter how charming he was supposed to have been in his youth.

It seemed to David that Mallorey's elusiveness was symbolic of her worth. He discounted the emotions that shook

him whenever she was near him, the jealousy that he tried to reason away, the whining tone of his own inner voice when he thought about her.

"How do I approach her?" he pondered. "I'll tell her that it's for Joshua's sake, that it will be good for him. She'll have to agree. And she'll convince Joshua, and then Sonny De-Lane will come along because he'll see it as a class act." David felt a certain pride at his reasoning. "Machiavelli couldn't do it better," he thought. "Reflected glory, at the beginning, but then it'll be my show."

He felt completely in control now, seeing his future clearly, knowing that there was no way his reputation would not be enhanced. The people at the Spires had been gracious and respectful toward him until now but the time had come to improve his position. He could feel that all the elements were there, the situation, the people, the timing that would make him an object of awe, a man to be courted, a figure safe above the crowd. "I'll have my pick of business," David thought. "I'll be able to refuse offers."

At other times he would have dreaded the kind of public spectacle he would have to make of himself, the way he would have to publicize his control of the tournament, his association with the foundation. But the end result would be worth it for all his ambitions will have been fulfilled: prestige, bargaining position, Mallorey.

"The perfect foil," David thought, picturing Mallorey at his side. He reached for the telephone.

He had decided that he could not woo Mallorey with grace for Joshua Quick had usurped that style. He must woo her with folksiness, in down to earth, no frills fashion with rock-steady entertainments, plain, wholesome environments and straightforward talk. He thought that the most effective stance he might adopt would be that of a sensitive eagle scout, a man who had returned to simplicity and sincerity after a successful fling at sophistication.

The meeting had been difficult to arrange. Mallorey had

seemed stubbornly intent on not leaving Joshua alone. David had only managed to convince her to have lunch with him by telling her that he wanted to talk to her about Joshua, to discuss something that might affect the man, something too complicated to talk about over the telephone.

"All right," Mallorey had said wearily, not wanting to be alone with David yet worried about anything that might affect Joshua, "where do you want to meet?"

"How about the Spud?" David suggested. "Around one?"

"Okay." He could hear the surprise in her voice. The Spud was not the sort of place David would frequent.

"See you then," David said and hung up almost immediately. It was in keeping with the character he intended to play. He was determined to be unthreatening, uncomplicated, someone she could count on.

The Eclectic Spud was a small, busy restaurant, quite out of place in the marina. Its decor was studied Poverty Chic, designed to entice the younger, less financially stable inhabitants of Viking Village. Out of work residents of Newport Mews and Bal Harbour could occasionally be seen at the Spud. They always disappeared again when their financial ships limped in.

The young people of Viking Village felt comfortable with the shoddy woodwork, the hanging plants, the streams of dusty sunlight, the carefully displayed open potato sacks, baskets of garlic, piles of green peppers left carelessly on display beneath a spotlight.

The kitchen was open to view, another guarantee of honesty and generosity. One wall in the kitchen was a bank of microwave ovens.

The menu was hand written on one sheet of paper; it was simplified to an extreme. The Eclectic Spud served baked potatoes. The longest list on the menu informed the customers of the various fillings with which the potatoes could be

adorned. There was the usual guacamole, the usual ham and bacon and cheese sauce, the usual sour cream and salmon caviar. There were concoctions of sprouts and mushrooms and jicama, bamboo shoots, bok choy and water chestnuts. There was ratatouille, there was spinach and pignole, there were several combinations of minced, shredded and cubed foods of all kinds. One could drink red or white wine of indeterminate California manufacture.

David thought the Spud a perfect place to bring Mallorey. He saw it as plain and simple because it served only potatoes. He thought that the contrast between this homespun cafe and the luxury to which Mallorey was accustomed could only work in his favor. The Spud's sole drawback, to his eyes, was that the chairs were uncomfortable and that the tables occasionally needed a scrubbing but he accepted that annoyance in the cause of sincerity. He hoped that taking her to lunch at the Spud would make him appear guileless.

He was distressed to see her enter the restaurant wearing an obviously expensive outfit. It was as if she was telling him that she suspected his motives for inviting her to lunch. If she had taken the invitation at face value she would have dressed down, in a style more appropriate to the atmosphere. David, for his part, had worn his oldest pair of jeans and his oldest windbreaker. He had even left off the Piaget watch he had considered wearing, for fear of ruining the image. Suddenly he felt at a disadvantage, his moves checked before he had even begun. He decided that a more vigorous attack would be necessary. David stood and held a chair for Mallorey as she seated herself.

"You look tired," he said, trying to make it sound like an objective appraisal of her state of health and not an opening attack.

"I am," Mallorey replied, watching him seat himself. It seemed to her that he slithered into his own chair but she rejected the idea as being based in prejudice.

"Well, it shows," David said, continuing his attack.

She wondered if she had aged in the last weeks. She had not noticed any deepening lines around her mouth, nor dark circles under her eyes. Perhaps they were more visible to a stranger.

"You like the Spud?" David asked. "It's one of the places you can really feel at home in, here in the marina."

"I've never been here before," Mallorey said, looking around. It seemed to her that all the people around them were in their early twenties. She wondered how David, so obviously more mature, could feel at home among people with whom he shared no common language or pastime or experiences. She considered, for a moment, that he liked to pick up young girls as sexual partners and then dismissed the idea. He was far too tense and fastidious to appeal to the girls around here.

David poured a glass of wine from the carafe he had ordered while waiting for her. The liquid flowed purple into her glass. She sipped at the wine and her palate withdrew from its tannin burn. She sniffed at the wine and was surprised at its slightly chemical bouquet.

His inconsistency was baffling. She still remembered the two bottles of wine he had brought her that evening, his enthusiasm and love for the taste of that vintage glory. What they were drinking now was like sour fruit punch.

"It's unpretentious," David said, lifting his glass pretentiously, "but it doesn't overwhelm the food."

She wondered if he was warning her. "What's edible?" Mallorey asked, looking at the sheet of paper. One corner of the menu was stuck to the table, caught in the debris of an earlier meal.

"Sour cream and caviar's always safe," he said.

"Okay," Mallorey agreed. She pushed the wine glass away, already feeling its acidity in her stomach.

David noticed the gesture and became even more tense.

She was making it hard for him, pretending to be indifferent to everything, to the food, the wine, the atmosphere of the place. It was as if she had been trying to ignore everything from the moment she walked in. He wondered if she was a snob.

“How’s Joshua?” he asked suddenly. He had hoped to bring that subject up later in the afternoon but she had forced his hand.

Mallorey shook her head. “Some days better, some worse, but on the whole not good at all.”

“I want to talk to you about him,” David said. “There are some of us who want to do something for him.”

“Joshua doesn’t want anyone to do anything for him,” Mallorey said sternly. She lived with Joshua’s desire for privacy, his jealously held dignity, his dislike of strangers interfering in his life. Some days Joshua’s determination to be alone could be quite wearing.

“It would be something to honor him, not to intrude on his last days,” David said solemnly. “And it would be something he could take part in, something to help others.”

“What are you talking about?” Mallorey asked.

“A foundation,” David said. “The Joshua Quick Foundation. For heart research.”

Mallorey looked up at the waitress. The woman had appeared just in time. David was talking nonsense and Mallorey needed a respite from his self-conscious solemnity.

“Two with caviar,” David said brusquely to the waitress.

“You want salad with that?” the waitress persisted.

“No,” David said, not bothering to ask Mallorey. Unconsciously he waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. The waitress left, trailing her injured feelings behind her like a tattered banner.

“We’ve planned it all,” David said. “We want Joshua to participate only to the extent he can. If it means just letting us name it after him, sobeit. If it means making a personal

appearance. . . ." he held up one hand to stop Mallorey's protest . . . "here in the marina, no travel involved, under the best possible conditions, before a carefully chosen audience, so much the better. It will be a tribute to him, Mallorey. And even if he only gives us an hour a week, or every two weeks, it would get him off the boat, get other people around him. Even with you and Consuelo on *Moorea Cloud*, you can't tell me he isn't lonely."

Mallorey sat back in her chair, struck by the parallel to her own opinion of Joshua's life. The slat across her shoulder blades squeaked and gave a quarter of an inch. For an instant she felt that she was falling backwards and then the wooden chair adjusted itself to her weight and held.

David's eyes had left her. He wanted Mallorey to have a moment of privacy in which to consider his arguments. He caught sight of a table at the far side of the room. A boy and girl were seated there. The boy had his hand on the girl's crotch, under the table. Everybody could see them; nobody cared. David felt the general disinterest as a personal insult. The casualness, the unthinking unnerved him. He shifted his gaze back to Mallorey.

She seemed to be almost reclining in the chair and he marvelled at her ability to be comfortable almost anywhere. He realized suddenly that her posture was more open. It almost looked as if she was displaying herself to him. He felt that hunger for her gather behind his eyes and in his chest. He resisted the impulse to reach out and stroke her breast. Even though nobody else in the restaurant would care she would rebuff him and, worse, it would be a breach in his idea of who he was at this moment. He was not supposed to be the type of person who did that sort of thing. It would be the end of Mallorey's regard for him, if she had any. He could read no sympathy for him in her face, no warmth. For a moment he wondered whether she slept with women. Just as immediately he dismissed the idea.

"You're going to do this whether Joshua wants it or not," Mallorey said, a statement, not a question.

"We'd like you to convince him that it is not an invasion of his privacy," David said. "We'd like you to tell him how much we respect him."

"Who is we?" Mallorey asked.

"Denny Brock," David said, trying to give the name the importance it deserved.

"Who is Denny Brock?" Mallorey demanded.

"Denny Brock *owns* this marina," David said, hoping to convey how momentous the man's decision was. A man like Denny Brock did not become involved in a charity lightly. "This is not a cheap, publicity-seeking promotion," David assured her. "This is a serious attempt to further the cause of heart research. You'd be surprised how many people here have already volunteered their time. And nobody is being paid."

"Who?" Mallorey asked, wishing she could be amused at David's intensity, at the way he was trying to sell her on the idea.

"Viveca and Alec, believe it or not. And you know *their* business connections, the kind of people they could involve in the foundation."

Mallorey did not know but she indicated that David should continue.

"Even Sonny DeLane will be involved. He's done a lot of charity benefits but he would probably adopt the Joshua Quick Foundation and put all his prestige and effort into it, exclusively. We could raise a tremendous amount of money with his help."

Mallorey felt as if she was listening to an inept pitchman. David should have sent Sonny DeLane to sell her on the idea and not tried to do it himself.

"Listen," David said quickly, "I misled you on one item, inadvertently. There's one person who will be paid. Selena is

going on salary. She's quit her job to work on this full time and Mr. Brock is paying her out of his own pocket."

"What will she be doing?" Mallorey asked, surprised. Selena had always seemed such a shadowy figure, so self-effacing that one almost did not know she was there. Mallorey remembered a moment when Selena had suddenly appeared before her in the midst of a crowd of people and Mallorey had thought her very beautiful. She had not been able to remember her name; it was as if she had never seen her before. There had been a second of stupefaction when it came to her that that beautiful creature was Timmons' wife. Questions and surmises had begun to form in her mind. And then, somehow, Selena had managed to make herself invisible again and the questions had died before they were asked. Mallorey looked at David shrewdly.

"How well do you know Selena?" she asked. It was a wicked question but she was unable to resist asking it.

David shrugged. "She's Timmons' wife," he said, "that's all I really knew about her until I learned she was working as a para-legal. It turns out that she's very intelligent and very efficient." He congratulated himself on having prepared that answer well before coming to this meeting. Nobody ever questioned how he had learned such things about Selena. They took it for granted that David Nash had his sources and made it his business to find out everything about the people with whom he dealt.

"Who told you so?" Mallorey insisted. Her persistence was becoming awkward.

"I found out," David repeated, hoping that there was mystery in his voice, intimations of subterranean networks and contacts in high places.

Mallorey dropped the subject for it was obviously making him uneasy. She considered, for a moment, that David might have had an affair with Selena. Then she dismissed the idea.

David did not have enough respect for Timmons Clarke to sleep with his wife.

"Well," Mallorey said, "you're determined to go on with this project whether Joshua wants it or not. That *is* the way it is, right?"

David nodded.

"So what do you want me to say?" Mallorey asked.

"I want you to talk to him about it," David answered. "And I want you to work with us on it."

"I can't leave Joshua alone. . . ." Mallorey began.

"Not eight hours a day," David interrupted her, having foreseen her objections. "Three times a week, part-time, whichever suits you best. That way Joshua will have some control over what is done in his name. That should satisfy your conscience that we will do nothing to embarrass him." David paused for a moment. "Frankly, I think it would do you good to get out a couple of times a week. Your devotion to Joshua is admirable but it's ruining your health."

Mallorey looked at him blankly. Then, in spite of herself, her hand rose to touch her cheek.

"Admit it," David pressed, seeing his advantage, "you are exhausted."

Mallorey smiled noncommittally and lowered her hand.

"It must be terribly difficult, taking care of Joshua, having to deal with Consuelo. The strain is getting to you, Mallorey. Other people may not see it, but I do."

"Do you now?" Mallorey asked, half irritated, half convinced. She knew that he was right but for the wrong reason. As difficult as it was caring for Joshua, as uneasy the atmosphere aboard *Moorea Cloud*, the main problem was her uneasiness about herself. Time was passing and she had made no decision about her own future. She found it impossible to think about it, to plan for after Joshua's death. Each time she tried to concentrate on her own cares, guilt would

take her over and she would tell herself that, for the time being, the only thing that mattered was Joshua. Yet she felt resentful and stupid, and then even more guilty. The strain of trying to keep her emotions in equilibrium was the true cause of her exhaustion.

The problem of Consuelo had been solved for the time being. At first Consuelo had been careless and provocative in her flaunting of Timmons. She had tried to continue bringing him aboard *Moorea Cloud*, but Mallorey had put a stop to that. Now she simply disappeared several times a week, returning in the early evening with a look of drunken fatigue on her face and a faint trace of alcohol on her breath. There were also occasional scenes. Once Consuelo had ripped open her shirt to display two great bruises on her chest. Then she had slipped to her knees, her head against Joshua's thigh, and he had placed both hands on her hair, caressing her as if she were a weeping child. Mallorey had been appalled but Joshua had simply shook his head sadly and said: "I thought you understood, but you obviously don't." There had been no further explanation and no further mention of the matter.

"Maybe you're right," Mallorey said to David. "Maybe it would do me good to take some time away from *Moorea Cloud*. Not much," she said quickly, "just a couple of hours."

"Mornings," David bargained, "three times a week."

"Twice a week," Mallorey countered.

"Tuesday and Thursday morning," David offered, knowing that he was at his best in the morning.

"All right," Mallorey said slowly, "we'll try it. If I can convince Joshua."

"You won't regret it," David assured her. "And neither will he. You'll see."

The waitress placed the baked potatoes in front of them. The skins were pale, unaffected by the microwaves. There

was a large dollop of sour cream on one side of the plate and a small ramekin of stale, wrinkled salmon caviar.

"How does that look?" David said jocularly, relieved that the first part of his scheme had gone well.

"Just terrible," Mallorey said. "I can't eat that."

David rose, dug down into his pocket and removed some money. He tossed fifteen dollars on the table. "Let's go," he said.

Mallorey looked at him in surprise. She thought he would have defended his favorite place in the marina, the surroundings in which he felt at home. The gesture of throwing the money on the table had shocked her. She had become used to not thinking about paying in a restaurant. Joshua had always paid when they went out but she could not recall ever having seen him handling money, so unobtrusively had he done it.

"Come on," David said, leading her out of the restaurant. "We'll never go back there." He made it sound like a pledge.

"I have to . . ." Mallorey began but David broke in again, not allowing her to finish. "We'll go somewhere else," he said firmly. "You need lunch." He frowned at her. "You *must* take better care of yourself, Mallorey." He was feeling completely sure of himself now. He knew that the abrupt way he had paid and left the restaurant had impressed her with his spontaneity and his ability to be in tune with her feelings.

"I'm all right, really," Mallorey said wearily.

"Yes, well, you say that, but I can tell. I'm your friend, Mallorey, whether you know it or not." He took her hand and held it tightly. "Do you believe that?"

Mallorey wanted to leave. David was saying and doing things that were so silly that they would have been hateful if she had taken him seriously. "Of course I believe that, David," Mallorey said soothingly.

"If you ever need anything," David said, "anything at all, you just call me."

"I don't have your number," Mallorey said faintly. It was the first thing she could think of to say.

"Call me at my office number," David said, "they'll know where to reach me." For an instant he had been tempted to give her his home telephone number but it came to him that it might make his assistance more precious to her if she had to struggle to find him. He was pleased with his own forethought in having an unlisted number.

"All right," Mallorey said, "if I ever need you I'll call your office." He was so inept it was almost laughable.

"Any time, day or night," David repeated, looking deep into her eyes as he kneaded her hand. "Whatever you need: a place to stay, or someone to confide in, or just some space in which to be quiet."

Mallorey removed her hand from his grip and smiled faintly. "That's very generous of you, David," she said. "I appreciate the gesture."

Her voice was so small that he had to lean forward to hear her. He smelled the perfume of her hair and his arm went around her. He wanted to kiss her, as if sealing a bargain with his mouth on hers. He felt triumphant. It seemed to him that she was truly responding to him, to his thoughtfulness, to his caring, to his generosity.

Mallorey turned her cheek to his lips. There was a short, awkward struggle as he tried to press his advantage. A short, braying moan escaped him. He heard himself and decided to settle for the cheek she offered. He pressed his lips against her skin, struggling not to embrace her fully, fearing that he might frighten her off with the intensity of his hunger for her.

Mallorey moved away from him. She was half-way toward the parking lot before he was able to react. He wondered if he had made a fool of himself, wondered if she had

heard the moan that betrayed his feelings for her. He decided that her emotions must have been stirred by the intensity of his. They would work together in his office. He would have time and opportunity. Everything was going as he had planned.

"I don't want to watch this," Sonny DeLane said miserably. He was sitting on the couch in the Bosts' living room, drinking his fifth scotch and water. His hands shook as he lifted the glass to his mouth.

"When was it taped?" Viveca asked soothingly, moving the bottle away from him.

"Yesterday afternoon."

A commercial faded from the television screen and a woman appeared, looking directly into the camera. She was in her sixties but repeated plastic surgery had given her a pudgy, kewpie-doll face. Her makeup was painted on to indicate where her normal features would have been had her skin not been stretched so many times. The frontalis muscles between her eyebrows had been cut so that her forehead remained unlined and unmoving no matter how enthusiastic the words coming from her sketched-on mouth. Enthusiasm was her stock in trade and one looked in vain for a crinkling of her eyelids. They, too, were paralyzed with repeated trimming so that the only movement of which she was capable was a slow blink. Her mouth moved stiffly, as if she was balancing an unsteady nose job above her upper lip.

"We have a special treat for you," she was saying. "A man who *never* appears as a private individual on television has honored us with his presence here tonight." She smiled carefully.

"Something's going to crack if she isn't careful," Viveca said laconically.

"Mr. Sonny DeLane!" Applause broke out and music

accompanied Sonny DeLane's awkward walk from behind a lattice-work flat toward the imitation living room set in which the woman worked.

"Oh, God, I can't look," Sonny DeLane moaned.

"Welcome, Sonny DeLane," the woman said over the dying applause. "It's just lovely to have you here."

"She drinks," Sonny DeLane informed the Joshua Quick Heart Research Foundation Organizing Committee.

"So do you; shut up," Viveca said. Alec moved forward to turn up the sound on the television set.

"You don't look nervous," Selena commented.

"After all these years? Don't be silly. What did I have to be nervous about," Sonny DeLane said, hiding his eyes behind his hand.

They watched as the harridan put Sonny through his paces. She was unusually kind to him, speaking with a syrupy sincerity that fooled no one. Perhaps it was respect for his longevity and bankroll, but her usual strident tone was softened. Sonny DeLane watched himself trading compliments with the woman and groaned out loud several times.

"I need a script!" Sonny DeLane said. "I can't work without a script!"

"You did very well," Malloreys said soothingly.

"Really happy to be on your show, Mady," Sonny DeLane was saying. His words were for the woman, his eyes for the camera. "I'm glad to be here to be able to tell your audience about the Joshua Quick Heart Research Foundation First Annual Tennis Tournament. That's a mouthful, even for me, but it isn't nearly long enough to tell you about the great work the Joshua Quick Foundation is doing for heart research which, as you know, Mady, is the number one killer in the United States today."

"Oh, my God, I said the research is the killer," Sonny said.

"And our dear Josh is, himself, a victim of heart disease,

isn't he, Sonny?" Mady asked, her eyes on the idiot cards.

"Yes, but thank the Lord he came through brilliantly and now is working to help other victims of this dread disease."

"Dread disease," Sonny moaned. "Did you hear that?"

Viveca pushed a silver bowl of cashews toward Sonny but he ignored it.

"And the tennis tournament?" Mady was asking.

"There will be a lot of celebrities there, playing tennis and mixing with the public. And there are some pretty high-powered people co-chairing the event."

"All I had was notes," Sonny informed them, apologetically. "It sounds like shit, doesn't it?"

"No, no," Viveca said impatiently.

"Who, Sonny?" Mady fed him his cue.

"Well, we have Joshua Quick himself, of course, and Mallorey Swann, that brilliant young actress. . . ."

Mallorey glared at Sonny but he was too miserable to see her. "All those years, shot," Sonny whispered.

"And Timmons Clarke, the brilliant young Olympic Marathon winner."

"Brilliant! I said brilliant twice," Sonny DeLane roared. "I'm ruined."

"And Mr. Dennis Brock, the president of King's Rest Enterprises. So it is a coming together of the worlds of sport, entertainment and business to help support this worthwhile cause and to express our respect and admiration for Joshua Quick and this great work he has undertaken. And, of course, to have a lot of fun while we're doing it."

"Who took the scotch?" Sonny DeLane demanded.

"Shut up," Viveca said, pushing the bottle toward him.

Sonny DeLane was now telling Mady and her audience about other celebrities who had agreed to join in the tournament. He was telling the public everything they would need to know in order to join the traffic jam at the marina. He was quoting the outrageous prices of entry tickets, "all proceeds

to go to the Joshua Quick Foundation," and telling them where to come in order to watch actors and athletes self-consciously play at being natural.

The interview was coming to a close. Sonny DeLane sucked at his scotch in agony as he watched the self-congratulatory smirk on Sonny DeLane's face as he finished up the sequence. The man on the television screen obviously thought he had not made a fool of himself.

"Oh, God," Sonny DeLane said again.

Alec turned off the television set.

"One down, five to go," Mallorey reminded him.

"Congratulations," Selena said. "I think you did very well." She was impatient, wishing that they did not have to waste time with these meetings, wishing that they did not have to waste time coddling Sonny DeLane.

Sonny was looking miserable.

"It was a new situation," Mallorey said reassuringly. "Of course you were uncomfortable."

"I wasn't," Sonny boomed in that expensive voice, "and I should have been. I was dumb to let you talk me into this."

"You volunteered," Selena reminded him crisply.

"Well, I refuse to do Carson. McMahon will sit there and let me hang myself and Carson will put on that face of his and it'll be the end of my career."

"Nonsense," Viveca said sharply. "You'll do Carson and you'll do Merv and Douglas and Snyder and Dinah and all the local news shows."

"You're booked," Selena added. "You can't back out now."

"Never volunteer," Sonny said bitterly. "I should have remembered."

Joshua came into the room, leaning on his cane. There was a pillow crease on one cheek and his eyes looked half asleep and unfocused.

"Is it over?" he asked, looking at Sonny. "You poor sod, you look awful. Someone give the man a drink."

Mallorey rose and went over to him. "Did you have a good nap?" she asked. She searched his face for signs of pain, knowing that it was always with him now, knowing that at some moments it was bearable and at others not.

"Yes, a nice nap," he said bitterly. "I've turned into a sleeping vegetable, doddering about and *napping*." He turned to the others. "I'm going home," he said. "My dear, new friends, I will no longer take part in your machinations."

There was a chorus of protest and Mallorey took Joshua's arm, pressing it anxiously.

"It's not only that I don't want to," Joshua said. "It's simply that I cannot. So do whatever you think has to be done and I shall show up on the appointed day. You will, of course, keep me from the crowd, preferably in the shade."

"Reporters. . . ." Selena broke in.

"Bring them to *Moorea Cloud*." There was a shocked silence. "I know that it has always been my policy to refuse the bastards admittance to *Moorea Cloud*, but the situation is no longer the same. Bring them. But screen them, please, sweet Selena. I don't want some prick from the North Barstow *Courier-News* gawking at the brasswork."

David had sat silently through the entire evening, watching Mallorey. Every time she went near Joshua he felt his guts twist. When she had gone into the guest room to check on him while he napped he had felt his entire body contract in protest. He knew that there was no romantic attachment between her and the dying man; but there was love there and David could not bear it.

"I'll take you home," David offered, rising. Mallorey looked up at him, startled.

"Come on," David insisted.

Mallorey picked up her handbag and led Joshua from the apartment. They rode down in the elevator in silence and waited for the attendant to bring David's car around, still in silence. David put Mallorey in the back seat and helped Joshua into the front.

"I was on board *Zaca* once," David said as he drove smoothly toward Portofino. Joshua's eyes opened wider, showing that he was listening. "Flynn was gone, of course," David continued, "but his presence still permeated the boat."

"He loved it," Joshua said quietly. "It brought him a lot of grief, but he loved it. We once spent a month on board *Zaca* together, drinking and whoring and carrying on like the fools we were. It was wonderful. Men aren't supposed to admit that they're house proud; it's too womanish a characteristic. But Flynn was house proud about *Zaca*, just as I am about *Moorea Cloud*." Joshua seemed to dream for a moment. "Wayne's boat is a real ship, you know: a converted Navy minesweeper. One hundred thirty feet. He always did things in a big way."

"*Moorea Cloud*'s the best boat I've ever been on," David said. "For size and atmosphere. In every way."

There was another short silence and then Joshua spoke again. His voice had a tight, reminiscing tone to it. "You ever hear the story about how Kirk Kerkorian sold his yacht?" David shook his head.

Joshua sighed and then mumbled: "I'm too tired to go into it."

Out of the corner of his eye David could see Mallorey put one hand on Joshua's shoulder and then withdraw it. David gritted his teeth and determined that he would make the old man like him, if he was still capable of liking anyone. It was the only way he could force Mallorey to see him, to recognize him, to think of him in more favorable terms. They had reached Portofino and David eyed the walkway leading to

Moorea Cloud's anchorage.

"If it was a little wider I could drive you straight home," he said apologetically. "But the car won't fit."

"Quite all right, Mr. Nash," Joshua said. "A little exercise will do me good." It was another gallant lie.

"Will you do me a favor?" David asked, helping Joshua from the car. "Will you call me by my first name? We're not friends, but we are in this foundation business together. I'd be honored if you'd consider me a friend, at least for the time we'll be working."

"David it is, then," Joshua said. "And you might as well call me Joshua. It will make things easier all around."

Joshua said it easily, for he no longer cared. He had seen the hunger and ambition in David Nash's eyes and even that no longer made any difference. The only thing preoccupying him now was his coming death. He was turning inward, willing all extraneous matters into oblivion. This man wanted to be on a first name basis: so be it. Let him take what pleasure he could in it. Let him eye Mallorey like a piece of pastry he longed to devour. Joshua held out his arm to her and she took it. There was no longer any pretense: Joshua leaned his weight on her.

"Will you be in the office tomorrow?" David asked Mallorey. He tried to make it sound like a straightforward question. Joshua looked at him knowingly and David cursed the sick man's sensitive ear.

"Yes, around ten," Mallorey said. "Good night." She led Joshua away and David watched them walking slowly toward the yacht. There were lights on in the below-decks cabins. David wondered if Consuelo was there, moaning and writhing under Timmons Clarke. He did not understand how Joshua could put up with such flagrant cuckolding. It was a miracle that Consuelo's affair hadn't given her husband another heart attack. If it had been he, David thought, Consuelo would long ago have found herself in court facing

photographs, detective's reports and a properly punishing judge.

Dina's days had taken on a sameness that, at any other time, she would have found unbearable. Mornings she worked at the various offices to which Sun Sign Temps sent her. She had registered with that particular agency on a whim, amused by its claim of matching workers and employers by astrological signs, thereby guaranteeing stress-free relationships and well-done jobs. Dina, being a Virgo with Taurus in the ascendant, had always found it difficult to get along with people less organized than she, and even more difficult to find a meeting of minds with those whose curiosity was stunted by their acceptance of current fads in behavior.

It was not that she believed in astrology, it was simply that it usually turned out that way. Peter was a Taurus with Leo in the ascendant, and had presumably overcome the worst aspects of that double pairing of high energy signs. It was not that he was less forceful than the stars ordained: he was as strong, determined and relentless as he was supposed to be; but he seemed to think that he had a more laid-back style.

Afternoons were spent working for the committee. Ken Takashima's report had been delivered in both written and verbal form. The written document filled fifteen pages of legal size paper and was unreadable by anyone who had no knowledge of soils engineering. Peter considered it a masterpiece of what he called "science rap" and he intended to make good use of it.

The verbal report was more succinct. "You've got a mess underneath those buildings," Ken Takashima had said. "You've got *everything*: uneven compaction, slippage and vibration damage. In short, you've hit double-zero all down the line."

Peter had seemed exhilarated by the news. "What can be done?" he had demanded. "Realistically, that is."

"Rip the thing down and start over," Ken had said. "It'd be the quickest and the cheapest."

"I understand that," Peter had said, dismissing that proposal. "But, for our own purposes, what can we demand that King's Rest Enterprises do?"

Ken Takashima had stared at him blankly. "Well, if you want to take an excursion into never-never land, you can demand that they consolidate the fill under the buildings."

Peter remained silent, urging the man on with his expression.

"That's all I can think of that is anywhere near the realm of possibility, and even so, you're in the realm of science fiction."

"How does one go about consolidating the fill under the buildings?" Peter had insisted, wanting to hear the words spoken.

Ken Takashima had shrugged. "That's *their* problem." Realizing that the answer was not helpful, he had promised to work up a paper embodying suggestions of possible techniques for solidifying the ground under Newport Mews.

Then he had gone, leaving Peter and Dina alone in her apartment, alone for the first time in several weeks without the pressure of a meeting or of immediate work to be done, of telephone calls to be made or newsletters to be typed and copied. Dina watched Peter light a joint. It was the first in a long while.

"One night's vacation," Peter said, waving the joint in the air.

"What are we going to do?" Dina asked.

Peter sucked at the marijuana cigarette and shrugged. "Go on with the committee. Demand that King's Rest set things right. Try to get some sort of response from them."

"But if they want to tear down the buildings?" Dina pressed.

"Then they have to find other apartments for everybody living here," Peter said reasonably.

"But they won't," Dina said. "They'll just wait until the leases run out and not rent the apartments when they come vacant."

Peter put his arms around her, as one hugs a silly child about to hear a lecture. "Do you think they'd give up a chance to make a buck?" he asked. "Do you really think they'd leave an apartment vacant for that length of time?"

Dina shook her head. She knew he was right. Peter squeezed her tightly and then loosened his grip, patted her on the rump and went back to studying Ken Takashima's report.

"We could force them not to rent," Dina suggested.

"Force them how?" Peter asked. "It's their property. What public agency do we get to come in here and say it's not safe?"

"The fire department?" Dina suggested.

Peter smiled, nodded and pointed a pistol finger at her in admiration. "Not bad," he said. "But would that be best for the majority of the tenants?"

"Ask them!" Dina said.

Peter shook his head. "This is a bigger fight than just what these people want for their own lives," he said.

Dina looked at him oddly. "What are you talking about?"

"Getting something out of those bastards. Long-term goals. It's not enough to yell: fix my walls, fix my floors, gimme a new apartment. We have to think in the long-term."

"Put it to a vote," Dina said uneasily. She sensed there was a gap growing between them, a real difference of attitude in the way they approached problems.

"Sure we'll put it to a vote," Peter assured her. "After we tell them what they're going to vote on, and tell them what we need them to know in order to vote the way we think best."

Dina stared at him, aghast. "I don't believe you're saying these things."

Peter shook his head at her. "Deen, you're a terrific lady,

but there are big patches of naivé in you. Look at the people who live here. All they're interested in is today's action. How many of them can think longer than a year ahead? If you gave any one of them a choice between a hundred thousand in hand or its interest at nine percent, they'd take the cash. These people are not like the folks living in the Spires. These are middle-class people with lower-class habits. Everything's for now and never for later."

Dina looked closely at Peter. She knew he was right about most of the tenants of Newport Mews. The most they would commit themselves to was a two-year lease and they thought nothing of skipping out if the spirit moved them. They were infected with the California syndrome, convinced that happiness was to be found in being free, going with the flow and getting *into* things. They were into religions, into exercise, into acupuncture, into biofeedback, into sex, into music. They performed adequately at everything they tried, yet no passion could hold them for long. They believed they were gorging themselves on life but they were only tasting a bit, here and there. They thought information was knowledge. They got their ideas secondhand and their emotions at one remove. The ones who were *into* therapy were more interested in the immediate intensification of their feelings than in results. The truth of the matter was that everything they experienced was in terms of how it related to them in the present. In some ways they truly had no sense of the rest of the world.

"Do you know," Peter said softly, as if reading her mind, "a couple of people on the committee suggested we throw a party."

"What's wrong with a party?" Dina asked, stubbornly refusing to grant his point. In spite of what she knew about the people of Newport Mews, she also knew that there was something wrong with Peter's view of how things should be run. Dina had always felt that decisions should come from

the people themselves, after long debate. She wryly admitted to herself, although it embarrassed her, that she much preferred the excitement of debate to the hard work this rebellion was demanding from her.

"You don't mean that," Peter said.

"But you can't go on making their decisions for them," Dina insisted.

"They make the decisions after I tell them the options," Peter repeated. "I'm the lawyer."

"And you load your arguments," Dina said with disgust.

"Toward what will work, yes." He was sitting up straight now, facing her squarely. "Based on my past experience. It's no use even starting an action of this kind unless you can come out better than even."

Dina was beginning to dislike him, to detest his pragmatic, emotionless approach. She wished there was more visible humanity in him, some more obvious tenderness toward the people who had joined the crusade.

"This isn't some town meeting in a soap opera!" Peter exclaimed. "This is a tough business."

"But you've no right to play dictator," Dina said, just as fiercely. "You have no right to parade your macho superior knowledge in front of these people and expect them to not question what you're doing."

"I have a right not to get screwed up by a bunch of ignoramuses who mistake their liberal vapors for hard reality!" Peter shouted. "It's all talk and magic time. They think that if they want it, or if they dream it, it will come true. That's not the way it works!"

"Vapors?" Dina demanded.

"Like turn of the century ladies with tight corsets and not much brains!"

Dina felt herself going cold with rage. "Susan B. Anthony?" she said and then found herself shouting: "Marie

goddam Curie? Mother Bloor and every damn woman on the frontier?"

"You forgot Lucretia Mott and Amelia Bloomer," Peter said dryly. "And you know what I mean."

Dina half-closed her eyes. She sighed. Her knees went weak. She swayed, her head back and limp. She began to fall.

"Deen!" Peter shouted and jumped forward, catching her before she had slumped to the floor. He eased her down, kneeling and holding her in his arms. "Deen?" he begged, frantic at her stillness.

Dina opened one eye and looked up at him. "You still fall for it, you turkey," she said unpleasantly.

"You didn't faint," Peter said. His face was grim.

"No. But what else was there to use against male, self-serving righteousness?"

He examined her. "That wasn't very kind," he said grimly.

"No manipulation of others is very kind," Dina said simply. She pulled herself gently from his embrace.

Peter looked at her for a moment and then nodded. His expression was sour.

Dina smiled commiseratingly. "The fruit of knowledge is a lime," she said. "It is sweet only in comparison to bitter ignorance, but it truly maketh the mouth to pucker and draw."

"Real is real," Peter said sadly. "I'm sorry it can't be all love one another and demonstrate with Frisbies and balloons."

"But couldn't it be partly one, partly the other?" Dina said. "It ain't the balloons, honey, it's the mutual respect."

"Oh, babe, you have so much to learn," Peter said dolefully, pulling her into his arms.

"So do you, stud," Dina said sadly. "You're in danger of

turning into a Nash. You wouldn't want that, would you?" She kissed him noisily on the cheeks, pulling at his hair with both hands and nibbling at his lips. "You wouldn't want that, would you?" she repeated, talking into his mouth as it opened to capture hers.

XII

The weather was killing Viveca. What had looked like health and energy was rapidly turning to age under the curing effects of the sun. Viveca had taken to looking at herself in the mirror, judging the spreading blight with exaggerated honesty. The criss-crossing lines in her skin had once looked like fine mesh: now they were turning into deep cross-hatching. The squint lines had become pinch pleats. The skin around her eyes was rough and sagging, lumpy with underlying fat deposits. It looked terrible in the magnifying mirror that Alec used for shaving. Viveca refused to step back from a normal mirror and look at the ensemble; she persisted in examining the disaster in extreme close-up before putting on her makeup. The finished face could no longer fool her into thinking that all was well. She could see the camouflage failing even as she applied it.

"I need a lift," she said to Alec. "Or at least to have my eyes done. I look like a turtle."

"You look fine to me," he said. A month earlier it might have sounded chivalrous to Viveca but now she was nervous and unhappy so any compliment was suspect. "Considering our ages," Alec continued, "and what we've been through, I think we both look amazingly decent."

It was at that moment that Viveca branded him a liar in her own mind. "Unbelievable," Viveca said, exasperated with what she took to be his deliberate, and quite possibly manipulative, obtuseness. "You truly expect me to accept that

crap? I know what I look like and you, you poor sod, had best look in your mirror once in a while."

Alec shrugged. "We have no need to look glamorous," he said. Then he looked worriedly at his wife. "You haven't been bitten by the L.A. bug have you? You don't want to go on looking twenty forever?"

Viveca walked away from him, back into the bedroom. She did not want to look twenty. She wanted to look presentable. No, she admitted to herself, she wanted to be beautiful again. She wanted to hold on to the easy, open, careless good looks of her thirties. She had admired her own style, knowing that it was only a slight exaggeration of who she had felt herself to be. She had appeared competent and sane, qualities not often thought of as factors in style in these parts. Sanity, to the people who lived around here, seemed to be a state one strived for, one that did not come effortlessly.

"I'm getting old," she moaned to herself. She had been tainted, in spite of herself, by the idea of old age as a disease. It was an opinion universally held, on an unspoken and even unconscious level, by all the people with whom she came in contact. Maturity, to them, was that point in the human growth cycle when one became sexually attractive. Old age set in the moment strangers' eyes slid away. There were, of course, scads of people who professed to seek only the inner beauty of their acquaintances, but they were inevitably people who had become invisible on the street and who had been forced to take up the study of the profounder meanings of life in self-defense.

"Any one of them would rather lay a dolly than a dog," Viveca thought. "The hell with that. I just want to be a terrific middle-aged woman." She did not even pretend to believe that what she was telling herself was true.

Alec came into the bedroom and watched Viveca for a while. She was conscientiously doing Nicklaus Rolls to tighten her abdominal muscles.

"Why aren't you easier on yourself?" Alec asked. "You look good, your muscle tone is fantastic . . ."

"For a woman my age," Viveca panted, ferociously struggling to keep her legs from rising as she forced her torso up from the floor. Her arms were stretched high above her head, the hands clasped.

"For a woman of any age," Alec said. "You have more character in your face than any of those chits out there will ever have. And you have wicked, knowing eyes. You know I still find you attractive, even after all these years."

Viveca rose from the floor and faced him. "My wicked, knowing eyes are hiding behind bags," she said bitingly. "And as for still finding me attractive, well, how long has it been since . . ." Viveca gestured at the bed to finish the sentence.

"How long has it been since you wanted to?" Alec asked mildly. She could tell he was seething inside but he refused to make a scene.

"Do you know what I need?" Viveca said bluntly. "I need to be in love."

Alec walked out of the bedroom. His footsteps disappeared as he strode over the thick carpeting of the living room. She lost track of him until she heard the faint sound of the freezer door closing.

"Shit!" she thought. "He's going to take a drink and it's not even eleven."

Viveca showered quickly and dressed. There was something waiting in her mind. She could sense it there, a thought ripening slowly. She fleetingly admitted to herself that her words to Alec were merely precursors of the idea now coming to bloom. She knew she was edgy. Her disgust with her looks was just part of it.

Viveca brushed her hair briskly, allowing it to fall into an unstudied, natural mass of ringlets above her forehead. It had taken three hours at the hairdresser, and the application of

many chemicals, to achieve that uncombed look.

“Hairdresser,” Viveca said to herself in disgust. “Customer’s wives at lunch in that awfully tacky restaurant. My God, what a bore this all is!”

She suddenly wanted to be away somewhere, living. When Viveca pictured living it was usually with a rifle in her hands, or following a herd of animals in a Land Rover. She remembered evenings in camp, and the second drink before dinner, the sounds of liquid, male voices clicking and twittering at each other in Xsosa. Now it was a bloody great game park and one had to reserve a place months in advance.

“That was another life,” Viveca reminded herself. “Why the hell haven’t we gone hunting here? Or in Mexico?”

The great hunger filled her and she realized that it was what had been waiting in her mind. She needed some danger, some stress, some pitting of herself against herself.

“Alec’s gone soft,” she thought. She could not imagine bedding with him. He was right: it had been a long time now since she had wanted to be in his arms. “All those others,” Viveca thought. “Nothing. Anybody’s arms.” She was becoming very angry at herself, at Alec, at the fools around them who confused sport and danger. Only Timmons knew, in a strange, inarticulate way. He must have suffered terribly, preparing for the race. But he was a mindless gamecock, strutting and pecking away, crowing uselessly and preening his feathers.

Viveca dismissed him as easily as she had thought of him. What she hungered for was the sudden light feeling in the gut, the beating heart, the rush of adrenalin, the two-second paralysis and recovery. For Viveca, fear was the emotion of accomplishment.

Alec had let her down. She could not define how, but he had failed her. She did not want to feel spiteful toward him, knowing that spite was unworthy of her. But there it was. She could not control it and she knew that soon she would find a way to make him pay.

David had made Timmons sign a contract. It was not enough that Timmons understood the advantages of appearing in the tournament. He had to be tied down legally, in case he had one of his bright ideas and decided not to follow the recommendations of the organizing committee.

Selena had approved when David had asked her advice. "You're right," she said. "He's liable to do something dumb and destructive."

The contract had promised Timmons publicity and promotion before the tournament. Every other participant would receive the same attention, but the contract was written so that Timmons thought the publicity would be especially for his benefit. The contract also specified Timmons' duties before and during the tournament and was worded as if his appearance was a performance. That, also, had been Selena's idea. She knew that he would take his part in the proceedings more seriously if he thought it was akin to acting.

Timmons had told Vincent Say about the tournament and his part in it. He had allowed him to read the contract. The acting teacher had smiled roguishly and then offered to produce a *clique* of screaming girls who would be instructed to mob Timmons after each of his appearances on the court. In return Timmons had only to provide Vincent with enough grandstand tickets for half of them. The others would make a suitable demonstration of tearful hysteria while trying to crash the gate.

"You'd have to pay a fortune for professional screams," Vincent told Timmons, "but the girls I have in mind are just getting started, so they'll do it for nothing for a chance to get near some television cameras. They still believe you can be discovered on the street."

Timmons had sneered with suitable sophistication at such naivete, hypocritically ignoring the fact that, just a few weeks earlier, he, too, had been waiting to be discovered by chance. He did not even have the grace to admit that the

tournament was just a more organized, efficient setting for the same dream.

David had had one more contract stipulation for Timmons, one that he had not written down.

"Clean up your act," he had said to the young man.

"What do you mean?" Timmons asked.

"Consuelo," David had snapped. "It looks lousy and if you expect any cooperation from Joshua you'd better not be humping his wife."

"It was his idea," Timmons replied sulkily. "I didn't want her."

"You jumped at the chance," David said coldly. "Think of it as having served its purpose. That part is over now. You don't want a scandal, do you? Not when you have so much respect and admiration for Joshua Quick and his great work with heart research?"

"Oh," Timmons said, finally understanding. "Sure, no problem. The man is a legend, right? I wouldn't do anything in the world to embarrass him." Timmons tried to put on an honorable expression but he did not quite know what one looked like so he settled for off-hand interest. "Just how," he asked, "is Joshua going to cooperate with me?"

"How does it feel," Joshua asked Mallorey, "to be a rich man's darling?"

Mallorey started at the question. A hot feeling of humiliation came over her. It was the first time Joshua had ever insulted her and she was completely unprepared for it.

"You mean a groupie?" Mallorey asked icily.

"How do girls feel about it?" Joshua insisted. He was sitting in an easy chair that the crew had brought up onto the deck of *Moorea Cloud*. The area where he was sitting had been covered with an awning so that the sun could not touch him. In spite of the fact that he felt cold most of the time now, his circulation having begun to fail, he found the sun's rays

tiring. Every few minutes one of the crew would walk past, ostensibly on some errand or carrying out some repair or maintenance work on the immaculately kept yacht, but actually to keep an eye on him, to see that he needed nothing. The crew had begun the death watch in an affectionate, subtle manner.

"I don't know," Mallorey said stiffly. "I've never talked about it with anyone who was being kept."

"I've begun to wonder," Joshua said. "All those girls I've had. Living beside me, being available. They were always good tempered, you know. The uncounted times they went along, uncomplaining, when I decided to move or go out or fly somewhere or just sail off." Joshua shook his head. "I've just realized that I never took their desires into account anywhere except bed."

Mallorey rose and moved lithely across the deck. The bikini she was wearing was the same color as her skin and, on first seeing her, one would think she was naked. Joshua appreciated her, and the effort she was making for him. Then he became introspective again.

"I think," Mallorey said, "that the girls were mostly happy to be with you and the adventure was the part they liked most." She grinned encouragingly at him. "Notwithstanding your prowess in bed."

Joshua shook his head. "It is too late for flattery, my dear," he said. "It is a time for truth. I never thought I would become so interested in a revisionist look at my life, but it seems to have happened." He laughed quietly. "I've grown to doubt the purity of my acts in my old age." There was strain, and perhaps fright, in his voice.

Mallorey kissed his forehead and then sat down next to him in a deck chair. Joshua's eyes were on her body again. He seemed to be examining it in a new way, as if he had never seen it before.

"It's quite extraordinary," Joshua said wonderingly,

"but I'd never really noticed, never really taken into account. . . you are quite separate, aren't you? All that self inside a foreign form. I'd been so used to women's bodies that they were quite usual and familiar to me, almost a part of myself."

Mallorey said nothing. Whatever his motives, Joshua's treatment of women, of those whom he did not marry, had always been chivalrous and open-handed. She could not fathom his questioning himself at this point. Of course his treatment of his wives was something else, again.

"What are you going to do after I die?" Joshua asked suddenly.

"I hadn't thought about it," Mallorey said, startled into honesty.

"You should. It won't be much longer. Will you stay in the marina? Will you remain in California? What?"

"I should think so," Mallorey said slowly. It was true, she had made no plans beyond the day to day caring for Joshua. "My acting is improving. Even Vincent says so. I still have so much to learn. And the business is here."

"Yes, the business is here," Joshua sighed. "It is also in New York," he said. "And there is regional theater. Do you think you could bear to learn your craft in less. . . worldly surroundings?"

"I had never considered it."

"May I speak bluntly?" Joshua asked. "How are you set, financially?"

Mallorey ran one hand nervously through her hair. "Fairly well," she answered, unwilling to discuss the matter with the dying man.

"The truth," Joshua insisted.

Mallorey pursed her lips. Then, with an effort, she relaxed the muscles of her face. Too much mobility led to wrinkles and she was determined to keep her skin as smooth as possible as long as possible.

"Truthfully," she said, "my capital is disappearing at a good clip. Even when I lived with Vlad I supported myself. I wasn't paid all that much for the films we made. I haven't worked in a long time. The dividend checks have not been enough to cover my expenses, so I've been forced to dip into. . . ." She stopped. "No," she said roughly, "you wanted the whole truth. I've been forced to cash in almost half the stocks I owned. And some of the other investments."

Joshua nodded. It was what he had expected. He had been thinking about Mallorey's financial situation for days now, guessing and wondering. He was dismayed to find his presumptions correct.

"I'm going to tell you what I've done," Joshua said. "I want no argument from you on the matter. Do I have your word?"

Mallorey acquiesced uneasily.

"I've instructed my attorneys that, after my death, *Moorea Cloud* is to be sold. The profits, up to a certain point, go to you. And," he added, smiling cynically, "I have stipulated that if the sale price I have set is not met, the difference is to be made up out of the bulk of the estate. I'm leaving you a quarter million."

Mallorey raised one hand in protest but before she could say anything Joshua cut her off. "You'll have a hell of a time with death taxes," he said. "You'd better have your business manager get in touch with my people."

Mallorey leaned back in her chair, stunned. "Consuelo," she said doubtfully.

"Consuelo has agreed," Joshua said coldly. "There will be no trouble from her."

"Joshua," Mallorey protested but he would not let her continue. "We will have no discussion about it," he said firmly. "I simply thought you should know now so that you can make arrangements."

Mallorey looked out over the deck of *Moorea Cloud*. It

came to her that Joshua was an even more extraordinary man than she had thought. This boat, which was his home and, possibly, the only true love of his life, was to be sold. He had been able to face that idea at a time when, by all rights, he should have been clinging to the comfort and familiarity of its decks and cabins. Its rhythmic rise and fall had rocked him to sleep for years. It must have been as soothing as a mother's arms to this restless, lonely man. Only now did Mallorey realize how alone Joshua must have been all these years.

"What sale price did you set on it?" Mallorey asked calmly, as if that was the most important thing about the future sale of the yacht.

"Three quarters of a million asking price," Joshua answered offhandedly, "but they will never manage it. *Moorea Cloud*'s not as elaborate and ostentatious as some yachts of its size. No marble bathtubs or gold dolphin faucets. I'd always preferred it plain; not that it's a hovel, of course. You know," he mused, "I never wanted a floating mansion. The wonderful thing about her was always her simplicity."

Mallorey hid a small smile. Joshua could speak of the yacht as being simple even though it boasted a small restaurant kitchen, full bathtubs, dressing rooms and enormous fresh water tanks. The crew's quarters were the equal of standard cabins on any other boat. It was true that he had not insisted on a fireplace in the main cabin and there were no Impressionist paintings hanging in the saloon. Compared to some of the fabulous yachts of the world, *Moorea Cloud* could, by a willing stretch of the imagination, be called simple.

"In any case," Joshua continued, "after the funeral there'll be buyers coming around looking for a bargain. I'm sure they will think they can con the widow."

Mallorey laughed and Joshua joined her. "How I'd love to be here to see it," he said.

Mallorey felt tears in her eyes. Then, unwillingly, aghast at the display of emotion in front of him, she was crying, mourning Joshua before his death.

Joshua did not speak, did not try to comfort her. He allowed her to cry, admitting to himself, in a rueful acknowledgement of his own vanity, that he enjoyed the sight. It was a preview, as it were, of the last great performance of his life.

“Enough,” he said finally. “You’ll have me bawling along with you.”

Mallorey reached for the handkerchief tucked into the lapel pocket of his dressing gown. She blew her nose and wiped her eyes and, at last, the hiccuping sobs quieted, jammed the wet ball of linen back into his pocket.

“Damn!” Mallorey said. “This mascara is supposed to be waterproof.”

“Back to business,” Joshua said easily. “You are guaranteed a quarter of a million. You’d best call your business manager now. Your arrangements should be made quickly. Right away, in fact.”

Mallorey looked at Joshua, examining his face with eyes cleansed of the blindness caused by habit. She saw the pinched, diminished look, the subtracted flesh, the prominent bones under the cotton dressing gown. His legs looked thin and vulnerable, the shins too obvious, the feet knobby and bluish.

“Now I have a question to ask you,” Joshua said. “It might be painful, but I need an answer.”

“Go on.”

“After my death you will have a nice little sum of money. How does it feel? Is there less value to the money because it comes from a man? Would it have been better for you, for your emotions, if you had earned it?”

Mallorey knew that she should have felt humiliation from the question. She also knew the importance of her answer to Joshua. She looked at him lovingly and shook her head. “It’s

a gift from you, my dear, dear friend," she said warmly. "It is more precious than four times the amount earned by my own efforts."

Joshua thought for a moment and then sighed. "I suppose, when you get right down to it, money is just money."

"The hell it is," Mallorey said briskly. "Where's the phone?"

XIII

This time the party was in David's honor. Viveca had wanted to invite that nice Mr. Dennis Brock, but David had dissuaded her, arguing that the man was too busy, did not attend parties, and would undoubtedly be out of town. Viveca thought it a shame, and complained that the chairman of the Joshua Quick Heart Research Foundation Tournament Committee did not care enough to find time to make even a token appearance. To David's relief Denny Brock was going out of town and so the matter was settled.

Brock did not say where he was going. He had become careless, of late, in leaving word where he could be reached in case of an emergency. David reassured himself with the idea that if Denny Brock needed him, he knew where to call. And emergencies were usually not that to begin with. Their solution could wait Brock's return. He was never gone more than three or four days. The world would not come to an end in three or four days.

Viveca had reserved the club tennis courts, paying an outrageous sum for the guarantee of privacy. It was a new rule at the Spire Club: there was no more member privilege in such matters. It was to be an afternoon of lunch and tennis. Guests were instructed to bring their equipment, wear white and plan to spend the day. One of the kitchen help was rumored to be part of a mariachi band. The rumor proved to be true and so several men with mestizo faces prowled the lunch area, playing the rich, caterwauling music of their

trade. Their costumes were of satin and gleamed red under the blazing sun. Their armpits and backs soon showed dark sweat marks, a sight which did nothing to improve anyone's appetite for the mediocre buffet. The sound of tennis balls thwacking against racquets came echoing from behind the green tarpaulin barriers surrounding each court.

Viveca hung on David's arm as she greeted the guests. It was still early in the afternoon and nobody was drunk yet. The guests were getting into the spirit of the occasion by sacrificing their vices to the gods of sport. Viveca had insisted that, in the name of athletics, only vodka and fruit juices be served. It also cut down on the expense.

"What are we going to do about these tennis courts?" Viveca wondered aloud. "They're screened off. You can't have a tournament like that. Where do you put the public?"

"It's been taken care of," Selena said. "I've arranged for a crew to come in and take down the tarps. Then we're going to remove the fences between the courts and open the whole thing up to public view. Except the edge facing out toward the street, of course. We'll put in bleachers. Everything will be replaced afterward."

"That's going to cost a fortune," Alec commented. He had been listening listlessly to Selena's explanation.

"Ticket sales are good," David said. "Dennis Brock gave the go-ahead on this. It's more or less his contribution to the general welfare."

"Decent of him," Alec said, "considering."

Viveca warned Alec off with a glare. She did not want him bringing up the problems at King's Rest even though she, herself, had been complaining about the amount of money it was costing them not only for this party, but for simple, day-to-day living.

"What about food?" Viveca asked. It was a natural question for her. She thought of the tournament as just another, extremely large, extremely complicated party.

"Selena's working it out," David said.

Viveca smiled her approval although she felt a twinge of jealousy over his answer. She had taken it for granted that she would have a say in the matter of the refreshments. She was the most experienced hostess on the committee and it seemed illogical, and slightly insulting, that she had not been consulted on the matter. After all, what did Selena know about feeding hordes of people? She was just a young, untried chit of a girl. She was sure to make mistakes.

Selena sensed Viveca's irritation and left to join Timmons working at the court desk, arranging game times for late-comers. Hours had been assigned when the invitations had been sent out but some guests had arrived late, some did not show up at all, and others had appeared before their appointed hour, insisting on playing immediately. Timmons was being blandly unhelpful, smiling and flirting with the women, shaking hands and challenging the men with a display of his physique. His tennis shorts were a size too tight.

Selena ignored him as she juggled doubles partners with the help of a large cork board, slips of paper with guests' names printed on them, and an endless supply of push pins and patience.

"Doesn't he look marvelous," Viveca gushed. It was so unlike her that both Alec and David stared at her in surprise.

"They both look wonderful," Alec said smoothly, wondering what his wife was up to. "They're both sleek young animals. The perfect advertisement for the clean, active, sunny, California life."

David cast a glance at the man. He wondered if Alec was being sarcastic.

"Healthy bodies," Alec continued. "There is some question, however, about healthy minds. Don't you agree?" He was looking at Viveca, waiting for her answer.

David could feel the perspiration gluing Viveca's arm to his. There were small drops of sweat on her upper lip and she

seemed flushed. The heat was becoming unbearable, he thought. It was not a day to play tennis. Not a reasonable day at all. But the people here seemed unaware of the sun, even though the men were sweating in their white shorts and classic white polo shirts with animals rampant on the bosom. The women kept tucking damp strands of hair back into the knots from where they had escaped. The women strode about, affecting an air of ease, of relaxed competitiveness. The men were more casual. They found their partners and strolled off toward the court allotted them as if they were heading for an uninteresting meeting. Their talent, or their incompetence, was hidden from public view behind the green-draped fences. Only an occasional groan, or short, sharp arguments, indicated that not all of them measured up to their image.

"Oh, Lord," Viveca whispered. The two men turned to follow her gaze. Consuelo had materialized in front of the mariachi band. She was dressed in a print jump suit, although the invitations had asked for white clothes only. She was singing along with the mariachis, beating time with the large glass in her hand.

"I'll take care of this," David said grimly, loosening himself from the grip of Viveca's damp skin. Out of the corner of one eye he saw Timmons hesitate and then hang back. David shot a questioning look at Timmons but received no reply. He headed toward Consuelo, coming up to her just as she, and the band, finished the last bars of "Una Paloma." Consuelo's head was thrown back, as if to give her throat room to deploy its resources. When she opened her eyes David saw that they were glazed.

"Very nice," David said, applauding softly. "I didn't know you could sing."

"Sure," Consuelo said. "But I'll tell you a secret. I hate mariachis."

"Ah?" David said, not wanting to start an argument,

hoping to keep the conversation normal. "I rather like them, myself."

He led her away from the band toward a far table. The musicians, relieved at her departure, stationed themselves at the furthest end of the terrace and began to play again. The clear trumpet sound soared above the guitars and the tinny, sawing caw of the violin. Under other circumstances the music might have been enjoyable.

"Are you having a good time?" David asked politely. "You're not dressed to play tennis."

"I don't play tennis," Consuelo said bitterly. "I never learned how. It's a stupid game, anyway."

"It's exercise, at least," David said.

"Exercise is for *gringos*," Consuelo spat. "We work too hard to have time for exercise."

"I thought the chicanos were very passionate about soccer," David said.

"*Fútbol*," Consuelo corrected him. "That's not exercise: that's our national pastime."

David shrugged and changed the subject. "Joshua didn't come with you?" he asked.

"No. He's not well." Consuelo stated it matter-of-factly, as if it was not a cause for worry. "Mallorey'll be here later, though," she said, "after she finishes looking after him." Consuelo spoke as if Mallorey was Joshua's proper representative, rather than she, herself.

"I'll be looking forward to seeing her," David commented.

"I'll bet you will." Consuelo finished her drink. She looked at David slyly. "You ever sleep with her?" she asked.

"No," David said with apparent calm.

"Too bad," Consuelo said. "Joshua told me she's terrific in bed." She pushed the glass away and began to get up from the table.

"Don't get up," David said, half-rising with her. He was trembling inside, furious at Consuelo for having repeated her husband's words, furious at Joshua for having spoken about Malloreys to his wife, furious at Malloreys for having made love with Joshua.

"I want another drink!" Consuelo's eyes were half-shut against the glare of the sun, or perhaps she was trying to focus through an alcohol-blurred mist.

"I'll get it for you," David offered. "How about some iced tea? It's a lot better for you than alcohol, in all this heat."

"How's it goin'?" Timmons asked, coming up to the table at just that moment. He had been unable to restrain his curiosity.

"You son of a bitch!" Consuelo said loudly. "You haven't called in ten days."

"I've been busy," Timmons said.

"Yeah? With what?" Consuelo demanded. "You don't have a job."

"I've been busy working on your husband's tournament," Timmons replied. He made it sound like a holy crusade. In a way, it was, for him.

David stared at the younger man in exasperation. It had been one thing to tell Timmons to break off with Consuelo. It was another to have had the foresight to know how he would go about it. Why couldn't the idiot have been graceful about it? Why couldn't he have given Consuelo a face-saving excuse, one that would have left her with some pride and not this anger and humiliation? The man was a complete fool. He needed a wet-nurse.

"You were supposed to be busy with me," Consuelo mewled. "I couldn't call you at home and I didn't know where you were! Damnit, T.C., you're no kind of gigolo!"

Timmons reached over to hit her but David's reflexes were fast. He grabbed the extended hand, wrestling Timmons to a

stop. The young man looked at him, his eyes gone clear and vacant with fury. He could no more have resisted the impulse to hit Consuelo than he could have stopped a coughing fit.

Consuelo looked at the two men locked in subtle struggle over the table. There was no expression on her face. It did not seem to matter to her who won.

"You are not going to make a scene," David said grimly, holding on to Timmons' arm. He could feel the perspiration starting on his face. Timmons was strong and it was an effort just to hold him. The drops itched as they slowly slid down his cheek. "Consuelo is not to be embarrassed," David said threateningly. "It would reflect on her husband, on the tournament. And we all know how much the tournament means to us." The last phrase was spoken slowly, each word detached from the one before. Timmons relaxed. His fingers opened.

"Sorry," he said. "I got carried away."

"I should think so," Viveca said. "Calling you a gigolo. My dear boy, I understand your desire to slap the little tart."

"Sit down and shut up, Viv," Alec said wearily. He had followed his wife to the table, watching the trio and the little mime play they were presenting for the titillation of the other guests. Viveca sat down next to Timmons and patted the young man's hand.

"We are going to screw up the whole thing," David said anxiously. "There's too much at stake for us to carry on about our petty problems. We are losing sight of the big picture."

Alec avoided looking at David. He had never heard him speak so awkwardly. The tournament seemed to mean a lot to him. Alec felt a begrudging respect for the man. He had not known of David's passion for the cause, had not known that David cared so much about honoring Joshua.

"I won't be insulted," Timmons said petulantly. He sounded like a spoiled debutante.

"Truth's truth," Consuelo muttered.

"Settle this argument right now," David ordered. "I won't have any more of this."

"He shouldn't have to apologize to that tramp," Viveca put in. Her eyes were glistening.

Alec put his hand on her shoulder but she shrugged him off.

"I've been called worse," Consuelo said to Viveca, "by better women than you."

David looked in exasperation at the three of them. He could not believe the childishness, the stupidity of the argument. It was no way for reasonable adults to behave. It must be the heat affecting them. The atmosphere was becoming too envenomed; he looked to Alec for help.

"Let's play some tennis," Alec suggested to his wife. "Maybe we can persuade Selena and Timmons to play against us. How about it?"

"Leave me alone," Viveca said edgily. She looked at her husband's bulk, at the civilized, affectionate mass of him and felt herself go mad. "That's just like you," Viveca said. "The simple solution to the complicated problem. You think that if everyone is nice to each other it solves everything."

"It helps," Alec agreed. His lips were smiling but his eyes were wary as he studied his wife. He knew her too well: she was about to do something terrible. He wondered how long he could continue living like this, not blaming her, forgiving her for her heavy mischief. How long must he continue coddling her? Wasn't it time for the past to be forgotten? Wasn't it time to find some contentment in their new lives? How long would she continue blaming him for the historic inevitability of her emigration?

"It helps," Viveca repeated, sarcastically. "Nothing helps with you bloody Americans. Nice as pie, and killers underneath."

"Shit," Timmons complained. His patriotism had been stirred.

"Not you, darling," Viveca said. "The older generation. People of your age have more of a world view, don't you?"

"I guess," Timmons agreed virtuously.

David thought that if anyone at the table was a killer it was Viveca. Timmons was only a careless second to her lead. It was, David mused, the first race Timmons had ever lost.

"This man," Viveca continued, compelled by bitterness, "used to be the most exciting, adventurous, challenging person I'd ever met."

"Thank you," Alec said, hoping she would stop. He did not know if he was angry; he only knew that he was tired.

"He could do everything with an ease that was actually sensual," Viveca continued. "Do you understand what I mean?" The question was pointed at David. He declined to answer her.

"Can you?" she said to Timmons.

"Sure," Timmons answered, not understanding what was going on. All he knew was that Viveca was upset. He thought it better to humor her.

"I'm older now. So are you," Alec said quietly.

"Older on the outside!" Viveca cried. "I don't recognize myself when I look in the mirror. I'm not that woman. I'm still the one who got the big five before you did. The one who saved you from stepping on the bush viper. The one who could walk as far, and as fast as you when we went visiting the *kraals*."

Alec felt himself becoming angry. Viveca was completely unreasonable. Of course it was difficult to grow older. She was still thinking about those days, long ago days of no value now. She wanted danger and effort. He should dump her out in the Mojave, he thought, with one canteen of water, a pocket knife and a ground cloth, and see how she did. And he wouldn't warn her about the Mojave rattler or the little coral snake, either.

"Big five?" David asked, puzzled.

"Five major game animals," Alec explained. "Leopard,

lion, so on. You hunt them on foot. There's a real mystique about them among the old-time whites." He shook his head. "She wouldn't fuck me until I'd gotten them all."

"You don't *do* anything anymore," Viveca said. Alec knew she was right. He no longer put himself into unnecessary danger.

"I don't want to hear this," Consuelo whined. Embarrassment had overcome her alcoholic indignation. "You shouldn't be talking like this in front of us. It's none of our business."

"What do you want me to do?" Alec asked. In spite of himself he had felt a twinge of worthlessness in response to Viveca's words.

"Something!"

"She gets off on danger," Consuelo informed Timmons.

His eyes widened and then narrowed again. David thought Timmons looked like someone figuring odds.

"What have you done?" David asked, fascinated in spite of himself.

"Mountain climbing, flown a glider. I soloed the first time up. Hang-gliding. I learned to ride a skateboard. I learned to ski, in three days. Went down an expert slope anyone in his right mind wouldn't have gone near. Hunted with a bow and arrow. I don't talk about that one: it wasn't pretty. Swam from . . . oh, hell, who cares!" Alec's fists were clenched. They looked like two, tanned mace heads at the end of his arms. David realized that, physically, Alec could destroy either Timmons or himself with no effort. It had never occurred to him before.

"The damn thing about it is," Alec said and then stopped.

"The damn thing is what?" Viveca demanded.

Alec looked at her pityingly. He could not bring himself to tell his wife that all the challenges she had set him, the dares he had accepted, had been relatively easy.

Alec possessed rare stamina and an unerring sense of

balance. He was a natural athlete and, until now, nothing had been beyond his ability. Whatever technique he had lacked he had quickly gained in the short training periods beforehand, or during the performance itself. It was Viveca who was in danger during the stunts she performed. She was in constant competition, with him, with herself, and so her performances lacked ease and pleasure. Alec had actually enjoyed most of the challenges for the purity of the experience. He doubted that Viveca had enjoyed half of what she had done. She never talked about exhilaration; she only talked about accomplishment. And she exaggerated the dangers. For some time now Alec had been miserly in his imagining of challenges for Viveca. He had not wanted her to be hurt.

"The damn thing is," Alec improvised, "that there are no dangers around here. There's nothing impossible to accomplish. It's time we gave it a rest."

"I can think of one," Consuelo piped up. "You know the divers in Acapulco? The ones who jump off cliffs into the tide pool? Why don't you try that?"

David felt the tension come over the table. He groaned, inwardly. Viveca was entirely capable of sending Alec to Mexico to jump off a cliff.

"This is ridiculous," Alec said. "Come on, Viveca, you have guests here and you're neglecting them."

"They're happy to play tennis," Viveca said. "I think you're afraid to do it."

"Damn right," Alec agreed jovially. "That's a stupid one."

"By God!" Viveca exclaimed, "I've finally found something this lumox is afraid of."

"*I'd* do it," Timmons said recklessly. In his inexperience, the only challenges he feared were to his self-esteem.

Alec looked at Timmons. He seemed to be laughing at him, although no smile appeared on his face. "You don't

know what you're talking about, youngster," Alec said. "I'd keep my mouth shut if I were you."

Viveca rose, superb in her disdain. "That's the dare, Alec," she said. "A high dive into live water. No silly swimming pool."

"How much you betting?" Alec asked curiously.

"Twenty thousand," Viveca replied.

Alec shook his head in admiration. "Means a lot to you, does it?"

"Come on, Timmons," Viveca said, pulling the young man to his feet. It was as if, with the challenge issued, Viveca was free to go on to other things. Or perhaps there was an element of flight in the manner in which she left the table. Timmons allowed himself to be dragged along, his expression a mixture of indignation at Alec's insult and surprise at Viveca's changeability.

"I want a drink," Consuelo said, unconscious of the havoc her words had caused.

"Get it yourself, you silly bitch," Alec said wearily.

"You sound just like Joshua," Consuelo said, stopped in her tracks by the tone of his voice.

"Tired to death, you mean?" Alec asked.

Consuelo thought for a moment. "No, more like fed up." She tottered away, her ankles bending outward over the height of her heels.

"What are you going to do?" David asked.

"Get drunk," Alec said. "And then make plans to dive off a cliff, of course."

David thought Alec insane. He could not imagine risking his life for any reason, much less for an hysterical woman like Viveca. The thought must have shown on his face for Alec smiled at him.

"You think I'm nuts."

David did not deny it.

"I kind of like the idea, you know?" Alec said. "I've

never done anything like that before. It should be interesting.”

“You’ll be injured.”

“That’s part of the game,” Alec said. “Viveca could have gotten hurt up in that para-sail.”

“Could she have?” David said, not knowing why he asked the question.

Alec grinned at him. “Smart, aren’t you?” David did not know what the man meant.

“Viveca’s really. . . .” David began and then stopped. He had been about to tell the man his wife was crazy. They both were.

“High strung,” Alec finished the sentence. “Not easy to live with, that’s true. But it’s never dull.”

David tried to accept what Alec was saying. He sensed that the man wanted no further questions, no attempts at dissuasion. He had decided, for no logical reason at all, it seemed to David, to go along with his wife’s madness at considerable peril to himself. David remembered that at the beginning, when he had first met the Bosts, he had blamed Alec for risking his wife’s life. Now it seemed that the truth was the reverse.

“You must love her very much,” David said. It had been a long time since he had felt so profoundly moved.

“Love her?” Alec repeated. “I don’t know. But the dares are part of our marriage. We’ve got a lot of life in common, years of being together, of building something. We get on. And when she’s not nervous she’s a good woman. Sharp. Rarely wrong about people. It’s a real working partnership. Not that crap people talk about, but the result of years of living together. You should see her charming the pants off the wives. And her brought up on a farm, too. It’s not something you break up just because one of the partners has a problem.” He stopped speaking for a moment and gazed at a point somewhere beyond David’s head. “I remember how

she was. Those wild animals she misses? She was just like them. Damn thrill a minute."

"So you're going to jump off a cliff just to keep her happy?"

Alec shrugged. "It'll calm her down for a while so we can get on with it. The big thing we have going for us is loyalty. We've stuck by each other all this time. Hell, man, it's not a little high dive that's going to bust us up." Alec chuckled.

It sounded strained to David's ear. He wondered if Alec was not inventing a story on which to tie his courage. The man had to be painfully aware of the short-term lovers Viveca took, the sporadic interest in other men that always culminated with them being barred from the Bost apartment. How could Alec talk about loyalty? Or didn't he consider sexual fidelity part of the bargain?

"But, damn all," Alec continued, his voice exasperated, "she insists on live water. Isn't that a bitch?"

Viveca's tennis party was winding down. Part of the sluggishness was due to the absence of the hostess. Some of the guests had remarked on her disappearance, others had not noticed, being too involved in playing tennis or discussing their new racquets, or the strengths and weaknesses of their game.

Timmons had not dared protest when Viveca dragged him away. For a moment he had debated the wisdom of abandoning Selena behind the reception table. She would be angry later and would probably treat him with silent contempt, refusing to speak, refusing to prepare his dinner, finding an excuse to leave the apartment in the evening and not returning until early in the morning.

Timmons had been shocked when Selena announced she was quitting her job. He had tried to threaten her, shouting predictions of starvation and eviction, wondering honestly how he could continue to outfit himself for his assault on

stardom if their funds were inadequate. Then Selena had announced that she was taking a temporary job with David Nash.

“Doing what?” Timmons had asked suspiciously.

“Working on the tournament,” Selena had answered coldly.

“How much is he paying you?”

“Seventeen-fifty a month,” Selena had said with an unnecessary note of triumph in her voice.

“Oh,” Timmons had said, momentarily silenced. The possibilities inherent in that sum of money had come to him. “Seventeen-fifty!” he had exclaimed with unfeigned joy. “I can——”

“You can nothing,” Selena had interrupted him. “I’m earning it and I’m going to keep it.”

Timmons had tried to argue with her, to no avail. “I’ll pay the rent and utilities,” Selena had said. “And there’ll be food in the house. But whatever’s left over after that is mine. If you need money you’ll have to ask for it. And it’ll have to be a damn good reason before I’ll loan it to you.”

Timmons had heard the word “loan” but had chosen not to comment on it. If Selena thought he was going to pay her back, she was in for a surprise.

“Community property works both ways,” Timmons thought. He did not reflect on the fact that under the community property laws Selena might have a claim on the surfboard, the weights, the tennis equipment, the car.

Viveca handed him the keys to the Mercedes and installed herself in the passenger seat. Timmons slid in behind the wheel of the gleaming sedan and placed his hand on the steering wheel with obvious enjoyment. He inspected the dashboard, moving switches on and off. He tried the radio. He looked like a child examining a new toy.

“Let’s get out of here,” Viveca snapped.

Timmons started the car, listening to the thrumming sound

of the motor with pleasure. He felt an intense excitement knowing that this was where he belonged: in the driver's seat of an expensive automobile, an expensive woman by his side. Fleetingly he wished that Viveca was someone else, someone younger, flashier, a woman who would show him off to better advantage.

"Where to?" Timmons asked.

"Just drive," Viveca answered. Timmons drove. He wheeled the car out of its parking space in the private lot reserved for the Spire Club. He stopped for a careful instant in the driveway, looking left toward the on-coming traffic. When it was safe to enter the street he did. The car responded powerfully to his feet and hands.

"I love it!" Timmons said.

"It's a bit stiff," Viveca replied, looking out the window toward the masts clumped closely together in the marina slips. She thought it looked like a boat orchard, empty of life, quiet, deserted. The people who lived below-decks were insects or parasites, swarming underground and ruining the purity of the scene. "The suspension is hard, too," she said, returning her attention to the young man behind the wheel.

Viveca felt the whirlpool beginning to circle in her head. She knew what it meant: she had felt it too many times before to be unaware of what it would lead to. The whirlpool always started somewhere behind her eyes, growing in strength and volume until her entire body was suspended in it. The whirlpool would suck her down, carrying whoever happened to be with her into it. The men Viveca chose were usually known to Alec. They all had certain things in common: they looked nothing like her husband, they were not involved in business with him, they were dispassionate lovers, wanting nothing from Viveca nor from Alec. She had always been careful, choosing no one with whom she would lose caution. Her adventures took place on safe ground, with men dedicated to sexual experimentation unfettered by thoughts of tomorrow.

Now she sat next to Timmons, a young man with all the earmarks of a latent blackmailer. She had no doubt that he was a survivor. For a moment Viveca played with the idea of giving him money. His eagerness for fame might prevent him from taking it: he would not want to chance being called a whore although he would be tempted by the cash. Viveca abandoned the idea. Her own compelling needs demanded a certain purity in the brief relationship. If she paid for sex it would not be the same thing.

“You hungry?” Timmons asked. It was an automatic question. He took it for granted that women expected to be fed. It had always galled him that, as an escort, he was expected to feed his companions. Women considered it their due and were insulted if he did not put something in their stomachs before attempting to nourish other parts of their anatomy.

“No,” Viveca said. “I’ve no appetite at all. That buffet did me in.”

Timmons kept quiet and merely smiled. His expression could be read in any way Viveca chose for it was meaningless.

“The Spire Club is a mess,” Viveca continued. “Everything’s falling apart: the service, the food, the facilities.”

Timmons still regarded the Club with the eyes of a social climber. To him it was the epitome of glamor and possibility. He never noticed details. It was the idea of the place that drew him, and the use to which he could put it.

“I don’t think it’s that bad,” he said.

“You don’t know anything,” Viveca said harshly. “It’s a pigsty.”

“Oh, Viveca,” Timmons laughed protestingly. He hoped that would be conversation enough for her. He was puzzled, not knowing what she wanted with him. Why had she taken him away from her own party? Why was he being forced to leave the place where the action was? He had gone along under the impetus of Viveca’s determination. He had never

thought to defy her, to refuse her any small service she wanted. After all, she had been his key to the better society of the marina. When she had taken his hand and led him away from the table he had followed unquestioningly.

Now, as he looked at her, their eyes met. Viveca averted her glance but in that short exchange Timmons understood. The idea was so strange, so unexpected, that it took him a moment to adjust. She wanted him to screw her! No other phrase served to describe what he had sensed.

Timmons had never gone to bed with an older woman. That was how he saw her: old. It was not just her age in years that determined that definition of Viveca, it was what she represented as an instrument of power. For a moment Timmons wondered if he would be able to do it, if he wouldn't be sickened by her dilapidated body.

Timmons had seen Viveca in a swimsuit, he had seen her in dance tights but he had never specifically thought about her body. Now he tried to remember what she looked like. He vaguely recalled that she was in good shape; for a woman her age, his mind added. There had been a slackness about her upper arms that had nothing to do with the rest of her strongly-muscled frame. It was the skin, he decided. The skin no longer hugged the muscles tightly. It sagged away from them. There had been something wrong with the upper part of her thighs, too, a rolling motion of fat overlaying the muscles. Her abdomen was slightly rounded, not the concave tautness to which he was accustomed. Even Consuelo, who was slightly plump, had not been that loose in the flesh. Timmons seemed to remember that Viveca's chest was covered with reddened skin. She was tan all over but the area between and just above her breasts was pink, as if the skin had become irritated with age. He chanced a look at her face. Viveca had the beginning of a double chin. The skin on her face was large-pored. Timmons was used to the tight, smooth skin of youth. The lines running from her nose to the corner

of her mouth were pronounced. He had not noticed, not thought of it before. She had always been just Viveca to him, the lines and wrinkles part of what made her herself. In this new context they were disturbing. Timmons began to feel uneasy. "She's old," he told himself. "She's probably got something wrong with her." The idea of age and disease fused in his mind and he knew that whatever was wrong with Viveca would infect him if she so much as touched his skin. "I can't," he thought.

Viveca sensed his nervousness, misread it and felt her excitement grow into a force beyond the whirlpool of sexual avidity to which she was accustomed. It would be like balling a foreigner, an alien, she thought. Young men were inhabitants of a strange country, a land from which she had been exiled for so long that she had forgotten what it felt like.

"Men don't think anything of trying it out," Viveca thought. She remembered the way Alec had been drawn to Selena and his inability to hide the attraction. She took it for granted that it was the girl's youth that had stirred him. She did not consider that it might have been her passivity that spoke to him.

Viveca examined Timmons more closely. Her breasts tightened behind the armor of her clothing. It was the same sort of appetite she felt when preparing for a stunt: a combination of fear and excitement. Afterward, when the stunt was finished and she had come through it unhurt, she was always sexually aroused. She worked off the desire with words, high-pitched words streaming from her in an orgy of verbal release that took the place of the real thing. She wondered, briefly, why she had stopped going to Alec when she was in that state, why she never shared the vehement sexuality of the experiences with him.

Viveca put one hand on Timmons' arm. Her hand was hotter than his skin. He recognized what she was saying with that touch. It both excited and disgusted him. "I don't have

to," he told himself. "I'm on my way now. I don't have to do this."

The fear was with him. There was always the possibility that the tournament would be a bust, that, through no fault of his own, the plans would come to nothing. "It's always good to have a little something extra going," he told himself. He remembered the kept men who lived in the marina, the young studs who lived with older women, acting the lover and not needing to worry about anything except keeping their clothes and conversation up to date and their love-making enthusiastic and unfailing. He had considered them coldly, never judging them. It was just another kind of job.

He looked at Viveca, making his expression as sincerely hungry as he could. He did not know that he looked pop-eyed and stupid. It almost stopped her; even in her most rapacious moods she had always retained some taste, some standards below which she never fell. The texture of his skin undid her. It was smooth and cool and it did not give under her fingers. He was so beautiful, a sun prince, strong and golden. She hoped it would not be like making love to a doll. She did not want him passive and seduceable. She wanted him to meet her half-way, to show some imagination and initiative in the coupling.

"Where do you want to go?" Timmons asked.

"Your place?" Viveca suggested.

Timmons shook his head. "Selena might come home. I never know her schedule these days."

"A motel, then," Viveca said.

Timmons said nothing but directed the car toward the Sea Breeze Motel, an institution famed for its rapid client turnover. This was the place marina residents came to when their roommates refused to go out for the evening. It was located inland, away from the ocean. It stood on a boulevard that served as the outer edge of an industrial development that had come into being in the last few years. Once, when

exercising on the roof of their apartment building, Timmons had looked out over the entire marina and noticed that, when seen from that angle, it also looked like an industrial park. The buildings had identical, flat roofs covered with white gravel. Pipes jutted out of each roof, obvious outlets for the air ducts that, inside, were cleverly camouflaged in the interior decor. He had briefly thought that the marina buildings were nothing but factories for living. Then he had dismissed the thought and returned to his exercise. Only the decor mattered: what happened behind the scenes was of no importance.

The Sea Breeze Motel was pale plum stucco. A large neon light poured endless arrows toward the manager's office. A sign indicated that the motel had color TV in every room. Viveca doubted that anyone ever watched television here, unless they were very young and needed the accompaniment of noise for everything they did.

Timmons hesitated. Viveca made shooing gestures with her hands. "Go register," she said. Timmons began to get out of the car. "Don't sign your right name," Viveca reminded him, afraid that he was stupid enough to do so.

Timmons slammed the door of the Mercedes, thinking that if he had come away with her at night they could have done it in the back seat of the car. It would have been cramped but he would have liked to take her in the luxury of the leather and carpeted interior, surrounded by the smell of an almost new, expensive automobile. The cramped space would not have mattered: everyone he knew had been trained to it from the beginning of adolescence. And they would have been able to drive away afterwards. There was no time or space for flourishes of tenderness in the back seat of a car: one was always vulnerable to a passing patrol car or to the gaze of eccentrics out for a stroll.

"I'll remind her to reimburse me," Timmons told himself as he walked toward the office.

The sly man behind the desk smelled of beer and cigars. He smirked as Timmons signed the registration card, completely uninterested in the name Timmons had invented. "Biff Arlington," Timmons wrote, feeling heroic as he bluffed his way through the formalities. The manager handed him a key.

"In the back," the man said knowingly.

"Uh, thanks," Timmons answered. He went back to the Mercedes and handed the key, and the cash receipt, to Viveca before driving to the back of the motel. She grimaced at his lack of grace but he did not see it in his anxiety to protect himself from public view.

The motel room was sleazy. It triggered new worries about athlete's foot, or bedbugs, or disfiguring skin diseases in Timmons' imagination. A double bed stood in the center of the room, covered with a tired quilted cover. Two armchairs sat under a window, placed at acute angles to a low, round formica table. Viveca wondered if anyone ever invited guests into a motel room. "Two couples," she said aloud and Timmons chose to ignore the remark. The body of the television set was chipped. It sat on top of a dresser that also served as a desk for people wishing to write a description of their stay in the room. The bathroom was supplied with three inadequate white towels, two washcloths, an extra roll of toilet paper and the usual, lying paper strip over the toilet. Nobody had bothered to put waxed bags over the toothbrush glasses. Timmons wondered if he could ask Viveca to shower before they began their business. He turned on the water invitingly but Viveca did not respond. She finished inspecting the bathroom, turned to him and said: "Well."

"Darling!" Timmons replied with false fervor. He took Viveca in his arms, gingerly. She looked at him in exasperation and led him back into the bedroom.

"Don't talk," she said. That one endearment had chilled her. She realized now, with passion-cutting dismay, that he

was an utter idiot. She looked at him with clear and unromantic eyes, seeing the vacuousness of his expression. "It's a waste," she thought. Then she felt the strength of his body and forgot about his mind.

Timmons wondered if he would feel the age on her lips. He kissed her once, forcing himself to do it. There was nothing wrong with her mouth or her breath. Her saliva had no taste. But that one kiss was enough for him; during the minutes that followed he never kissed her again. Instead, his lips nibbled at her, beginning with the straining tendons of her neck. Viveca noticed his avoidance of her mouth and recognized it for what it was.

"A whore after all," she thought, and then proceeded to enjoy him. She had seen portions of his body before: the slice of chest when he wore an open shirt, the arms and legs in tennis costume. She had never seen him completely naked.

When he removed his clothes she was stunned by the perfection of his body. His skin was sleek, as flawless as a sculpture. He did not have the aggressive forms of a body-builder, yet he could have posed for an anatomy chart. Each muscle group was defined. His chest was not flat: the pectorals bulged gently. His shoulders were broad, his arms in proportion. He had an enviably small waist, a flat abdomen. His torso was made of corrugated flesh. His butt was small and tight, his thighs and legs like corded whips, showing the result of his training as a runner.

Viveca began to feel strange, reluctant to remove her clothes. It came to her that there was something unaesthetic about an older woman and a very young man. Then she shook off the feeling and reached for him.

She had never thought of herself as a connoisseur of men's genitals, but even as she caressed him she found herself interpreting what she felt under her hand. Some men's genitals were shy, and some aggressive, some bobbed carelessly and others were cold and independent of the people involved.

Timmons' were functional and dumb, suited to their task but not truly related to their owner.

Timmons was surprised to find that he had no trouble responding to her caresses. Viveca knew what she was doing. He could not have done half as well himself. Timmons began to relax, to put aside fears of plagues and epidemics. He was surprised that she knew just how and where to touch him. He began to feel that somehow their positions had become reversed. She was no longer the beggar. As he grew more aroused he began to ask for what he needed, moving his body under her hands, indicating with a tilt of the pelvis or a groaned complaint when she did something wrong. He felt served, as if this was all for his benefit. He did not consider that Viveca was preparing him for her own use.

Viveca wished desperately that he would reciprocate, that he would pay a minimum of attention to her own hungers, her own desire to be touched. But he lay on the hastily uncovered bed, his arms and legs spread wide, while she artfully manipulated him, trailing her fingernails down his skin, squeezing, pulling, licking him. He reached a level of arousal that forced him to touch her. His hands grabbed at her roughly, shoving her into position.

"Not yet," she protested, dragging his fingers toward her breasts. Impatiently, Timmons did what was expected of him. In spite of him Viveca felt herself soaring. She wanted to bite, to snap at him. "Like a dog," she thought, and immediately forgot it. She fastened her fingers in the muscles of his butt and pulled him toward her. Timmons fumbled for a moment and then entered her, abandoning any pretense of sharing the moment with her. He whipped himself into a frenzy, following his own rhythm. He reached his climax quickly and collapsed on his side, immediately uneasy at still being joined to her.

Viveca stared at him in disgust. "Shit," she said feelingly. "You young punks!" She began to knead him with the

muscles within her vagina. Timmons' eyes opened in surprise. He had heard of such things, in the locker rooms of the world, but had dismissed the gossip as just so much pornographic fiction.

The sensations were becoming too complicated to define, too pleasureable to question. Timmons moaned and held on to Viveca. It was the first time he had touched her with any sincerity since they had entered the motel room.

He sensed the change in Viveca. He watched her face go blank and the pink of her chest turn bright until it was almost red. "Goddam!" Timmons gasped as his body took over.

They went at each other feverishly now, Viveca at last convinced that Timmons would cooperate, that it would be a joint venture. He turned her on her back, laboring diligently. Their partnership took an up-swing and peaked. And peaked again, hitting new highs with each additional investment of their sexual resources. Timmons began to tinker with their position but Viveca slapped him back to a more conservative stance. She tried some sophisticated maneuvers with her fingers that sent him rocketing upward. He reciprocated, and watched her ascend, convulse and begin to fade. He caught her on the downslide and they went on a rampage.

The bed was a shambles, the sheets ripped and mounded from the turbulence of their union. Timmons lifted Viveca from the bed, collapsing on the floor under her writhing, delirious weight. In a lucid moment he pulled a sheet off the bed and tried to arrange it under them, to no avail. Viveca ignored the practicality of the sheet, of the pillows that Timmons managed to capture. She worked him over like a conman snapping pieces from a fool, taking everything he had saved, forcing him to call on the treasures hidden in the cookie jar, the sugar bowl, the dresser drawer. She left him bankrupt and dazed, knowing that he had been had and grateful for every minute of it.

When they finally left the motel room, early in the eve-

ning, Viveca had reverted to her usual, slightly removed demeanor. Timmons was pale and thoughtful. His knees and elbows were raw but he did not care. He realized that he had been given an education. And that it might serve, in the future. And, anyway, he had taken a long shower.

XIV



Malloreys had never felt so tired. The acting class was the only place in which she could work off the nervous energy that filled her, the paradoxical restlessness that ruined her sleep and caused her to make small mistakes in everything she did.

Her days were divided between David Nash's office and *Moorea Cloud*. David had put her in charge of assuring the appearance of celebrities at the tournament and Malloreys had willingly gone about the business of beguiling or pressuring them into volunteering their participation.

She had spent days on the telephone, talking to managers or press agents and then, finally, to some of the celebrities themselves. A few had been generous, accepting her invitation immediately. Others, mostly of the new breed of television actors, had had to be convinced. Their desire to seem just like plain folks had forced them into strict rituals of hominess and a rigid defense of their privacy just as earlier entertainers had been forced into glamor. Malloreys did not know which was worse: the street-wise hesitations of the young or the profit-counting qualms of the more mature. Still, she had succeeded in securing promises from what David insisted on calling "a bevy of stars." Malloreys had turned over her lists of names to Selena and announced that she was tired and needed a rest.

Selena was calm, much calmer than Malloreys. She handled the logistics of the tournament with apparent ease, hiring

a security force, ordering tickets, flyers, name-tags, direction signs to be printed. She was a marvel of competence and efficiency as she coordinated the food, the parking, the construction of grandstands and the preparation of staff who would greet and serve the visitors.

Mallorey and Selena had composed a letter of invitation to be sent to various athletes. The letter went out over Timmons' signature. Later, he was corralled for three days' work in following up the written invitations with telephone calls. He began sullenly, complaining about the waste of his time, but soon warmed to the task as he realized how many of his colleagues were willing to join the tournament, and how many mistakenly congratulated him on the fine idea.

David Nash had taken care of inviting members of the business community, telephoning and writing to executives in the area, holding out the promise of meeting and playing tennis with "a bevy of stars and renowned athletes" as an enticement. He approached only those executives who might, in the future, be of some use to him. He did not consider that the true holders of power might be too busy to take part in a weekend of tennis no matter how good the cause.

His greatest response came from other lawyers, partners in the powerful firms that represented the most important clients in the state. He wondered at the almost unanimous agreement he received from those men, finally taking it as a sign of their respect for him. Selena said nothing to David when he speculated on his sudden emergence into a place of influence. But later, when telling Mallorey about it, she whispered: "Star-humpers. All lawyers around here are star-humpers."

Mallorey tended to agree with her. And they had another proof of Selena's thesis sharing the office with them. The accountant who had been brought in by Dennis Brock to oversee the financial side of the tournament spent his spare

time recounting his brushes with the great. He, himself, never came into direct contact with them but he had a cousin who had written several insurance policies for "names," and his wife's brother had once replaced a filling for Jill St. John. He gossiped constantly, describing one actor's new paramour, and another actress' brush with the law and a third's nervous breakdown. They spent titillating mornings listening to him recount stories garnered from magazines and fourth-hand, watching him become as over-stimulated as if he had drunk too much coffee.

Mallorey's afternoons were spent on *Moorea Cloud*. Joshua had become a wraith, moving slowly from the master cabin to the shaded deck and back again. He spoke little but spent most of his time lifting a glass of vodka to his lips, holding it tightly with both trembling hands.

Consuelo filled the yacht with her brooding. She was given to stomping out of whatever area Joshua happened to be inhabiting, showing with a toss of her hair and averted face that she was angry. Mallorey could not tell what Consuelo was angry about. Perhaps it was Timmons' absence. He had disappeared completely from *Moorea Cloud*. It was as if he had never been there, never caused contention between Joshua and his wife. Now only Consuelo's bitchiness kept his presence alive.

Or perhaps it was that Joshua was taking a long time to die. There were moments when Mallorey, herself, wished he would get on with it, although she always felt guilty when such thoughts struck her. Joshua's pain had shrunk him, both physically and in the expression of his personality. He had dwindled into a little old man, fragile and helpless. Manny and the other crew members now tended to his physical needs, not allowing either of the two women to touch him. Mallorey was jealous of their attention to Joshua. The whole reason for her being aboard *Moorea Cloud* had been to care for the man, to see to his comfort, although she admitted to

herself that she would have hated to wash and dress the wasted body that once had been so robust, so hot and vigorous. She berated herself for the distaste Joshua's body aroused in her now. She considered herself selfish and weak but could not change the quailing, the shrinking away that was her reaction each time she looked at Joshua.

Yet there were moments when Joshua's spirit roused and his voice came strongly as he reminisced and told stories of the old days. Mallorey listened carefully, knowing that it was his way of leaving something of himself behind. He admitted it one day, urging her to remember all that he told her.

"I'll remember," Mallorey said soothingly. "But you shouldn't forget the films. They'll still be here after both of us are gone."

"The movies!" Joshua said despairingly. "They're not me!" And he fell silent.

"Yes, they are, Joshua," Mallorey said. "They're you, everything you did, all the people who enjoyed them and who will still enjoy them."

"My dear girl," Joshua had replied, with some of the old cynicism, "when I'm dead there will be a Joshua Quick retrospective. Just wait and see. And then they'll have Joshua Quick Week on local television stations, one year to the day after the studio releases the films to cash in on my croaking. And at the next Academy Awards there will be a moment of smarmy nostalgia as they flash stills from three or four of my more ridiculous epics on the screen. And some young stud, whom I've never met, will gaze soulfully from the screen to the television camera, linking his image with mine in hopes that he'll be offered a big part. He'll read the few lines some desperate writers have slapped together and then they'll go to a commercial."

"You can't stop them," Mallorey said.

"But you can make it as scandalous as my life was," Joshua whispered. "You can make a scene. You could take

off your clothes and display your admirable breasts coast to coast."

His hand went to her breast and fondled it. His touch was cold. Mallorey shivered. His hand was like death touching her. Joshua felt her reaction and grimaced. "I'm sorry, love," he said, "I shouldn't have done that."

Mallorey took his hands in hers. She saw how blue his fingernails were. She held his hands to her breasts. "Go ahead," she said, "I've always loved it when you touched me."

"You're a kind child," Joshua murmured and firmly took his hands from her grasp.

"Everyone can see you," Consuelo said loudly.

"I don't care," Mallorey said. "Let them."

"Filthy old fart!" Consuelo spat at Joshua.

"Patience, my dear," Joshua responded. "You'll be rich soon enough. Allow me my last little fling." Consuelo marched away, indignant. Joshua looked after her. "You'd almost think she really resents it now," he said.

"She cares for you," Mallorey said, not knowing whether it was a lie or not.

"Go home," Joshua said to Mallorey. "I'm going to take a little nap now and I don't want you waiting about."

"I'll stay," Mallorey offered.

"No," Joshua said irritably. "Go away. Go do whatever it is you do when you're not here."

"The tournament," Mallorey said. "I work on the tournament. Everyone's coming. They all want to see you, and honor you."

"And get their names in the paper and have photographs taken that will appear in magazines." Joshua's face crumpled. "I don't want anyone to see me," he said. "I'm old and disgusting."

Mallorey embraced him lightly. "You are never disgusting," she said. "You are a wicked man and *everyone* wants

to be with you. And all that talk about your age is false vanity." She hugged him carefully. "You *will* come to the tournament, won't you?"

"No."

Mallorey kissed him on the cheek. "Yes, you will," she said. "It's for your own foundation. You can't run out on the people who need your help."

"Go away, you silly, silly girl," Joshua moaned.

Mallorey left him. When she reached the end of the pier she turned back and saw two crewmen lifting Joshua from his chair and helping him move inside. He was bent over, one hand over his ribs, as if reassuring himself that his heart was still beating.

Mallorey returned to her apartment. She knew she should sleep, that she was operating on nerves now and that only rest would restore her strength. But the apartment had become like a hotel room to her, a place to sleep fitfully, to eat breakfast, to change clothes. It was not where she lived, where she could read or listen to music or think or restore her soul.

She showered and changed into a pair of shorts and a halter top. She opened the refrigerator and stared balefully at its empty interior. There were only a few bottles of tonic water and a carton of cream sitting on one shelf. Mallorey shut the refrigerator door and tried to work up some enthusiasm for shopping at the marina supermarket. She could not.

She walked into the bedroom and stripped off her clothes, pulling an old nightgown over her head. It covered her completely with its high neck and long sleeves. Mallorey only wore it when she was depressed. It was a throwback to something in her childhood, being held in a blanket, perhaps, or in her mother's arms.

"I'm tired," she moaned, giving in to the fatigue that she had been feeling and refusing to acknowledge. It was not only the physical stress, the constant travel between her

apartment and *Moorea Cloud*, the work in the office and the more demanding work with Vincent Say. She was emotionally fatigued, she realized, from the constant necessity of forcing herself to be attuned to Joshua and his moods, the nightly uncertainty as to where she would sleep, the pressure of David's interference in the office and his endless approaches to her. He was inept, and impossible to discourage. The man would not leave her alone. He intruded himself into conversations between Selena and herself, listening in on telephone conversations, making countless suggestions as to how they should do their jobs. After every suggestion he would simply stand there waiting for an enthusiastic response, for applause.

It had become embarrassing. Selena had said nothing at first but then, when David's attentions had become more blatant, more childish, she and Mallorey had taken to simply looking at each other in silent, blank-faced communication.

"My life has no comic relief," Mallorey thought sleepily. She lay down on the bed, grateful that she could stretch out after the less generous space available on *Moorea Cloud*. She allowed her body to sink into the mattress. In the moment before sleep she felt as if she was floating.

She was awakened by the sound of someone knocking on the door, followed by an insistent ringing of the doorbell. There was a moment's silence and then the sound of rapping began again.

"What?" Mallorey thought confusedly. Her mind still held the impression of floating and she imagined her body falling back onto the bed as she was jarred awake. She looked at the small travel clock next to her bed. "Six. Morning? Did I sleep through the night?" She turned to look out the window. There was no way to tell if the half light outside was due to dawn or dusk.

Mallorey rose and walked unsteadily toward the front door, trying to blink her eyes clear of sleep.

"Could we have just a few minutes of your time?" Dina asked when the door was fully open.

"I was asleep," Mallorey explained unnecessarily.

"I'm sorry we woke you," Dina said, waiting to be invited into the apartment. She had learned, through the weeks of organizing the tenants, that it was necessary to give the impression that one would not go away. It called for a stolid posture, the body canted slightly forward and a calm, determined expression on the face. Still, Mallorey had not offered an invitation. Dina had been eager to finally confront Mallorey Swann. She had been curious about the surroundings in which the woman lived and had taken it for granted that there would be something special about the decor. She had imagined elegant furniture imaginatively arranged, bright and subtle fabrics, fresh flowers, amusing or intriguing *objets* sowed thickly on antique surfaces.

Peter stood behind her, inspecting the surprisingly vulnerable woman standing in the doorway. The few glimpses he had had of Mallorey had piqued his curiosity. From far off she had seemed sure of herself and contained. Now she appeared rumpled and very human, a woman hesitating to allow strangers into her apartment not out of snobbishness but because she was off guard.

Mallorey suddenly realized that a man was standing in the hallway and she looked down at her clothes, not remembering how she was dressed. She was relieved to see that she had put on a gown before going to bed. She was decently covered. She knew that it would not have mattered if she had answered the door wearing less: half-naked bodies were the norm here.

"If you could tell me what it's about?" Mallorey asked.

"It's about the cracks in the walls and ceilings," Dina said, using the same line that had gained her entrance to so many other apartments in Newport Mews. "We'd like to talk to you about it. This is Peter, our lawyer." She gestured toward him.

"I don't remember your name," Mallorey said, stepping back from the opened door and allowing them to enter. "Just sit down anywhere."

"I'm Dina, and we've organized a strike against the landlord," she said, sitting on the couch. "We were wondering if you'd join us in it."

"What sort of strike?" Mallorey asked, bewildered.

"A demonstration, to start with," Peter answered. "There's a tenants' committee and we're going to put pressure on the owners to do something about the landfill under the buildings."

"I don't think. . . ." Mallorey began but Peter interrupted her.

"Why don't you just let me explain what's going on," he said forcefully, "and then you can think it over."

Mallorey nodded, impatient to have this intrusion over with, knowing that the quickest way was to let him have his say. Peter recounted the problems with the landfill, the soils tests that had been done, the organizing of the tenants.

"So there's going to be a demonstration," he said, "and we'd like you to join us."

"Oh, I don't think I could be of much help," Mallorey protested, taken aback by the activities that had been going on without her being aware of them.

"You're a tenant, aren't you?" Dina smiled, but Peter overrode her. "You're the most famous face we've got in Newport Mews," he said bluntly. "We've got some other people here with all sorts of credentials, people from U.S.C., and from a couple of artists' agencies, and lower echelon network folks, which always helps. And there are a lot of others, secretaries and stews, people in less glamorous jobs."

"But I'm a famous face?" Mallorey smiled wryly.

"Yes. It would help with the TV news people." Peter sounded very sure of himself, as if there was no question of her refusing.

Mallorey shook her head. "I'm afraid you've overestimated my importance," she said.

"You've been in the news lately," Peter reminded her. "You're visible."

Mallorey's face went blank. Peter saw, with some interest, that her eyes had darkened. "Not the news, surely," Mallorey drawled. "The gossip columns, more likely."

Dina looked at Peter in surprise and exasperation. She could not believe how undiplomatic he was being. Worse: insulting. She wondered if he was intimidated by Mallorey, or whether he simply thought it honest and straightforward to tell the woman that they wanted her for her scandal value.

"It's just that it affects you, too," Dina said, hoping to repair Peter's *gaffe*. She wondered how he had managed to deal with people in the city government. Maybe, in politics, the jackboot was more efficient than tip-toes. "Anything that touches any of us here touches all of us. If we can force King's Rest to make repairs, then you will benefit, too."

Mallorey wished she was not still half asleep. If she had been wider awake she might not even have asked them into her home. "Excuse me," she said, hiding a yawn behind her hand.

"We shouldn't have awakened you, but it's only six in the evening and we couldn't know. . . ." Dina's voice trailed away.

"Let me wash my face," Mallorey said, her voice low and muffled. She rose and disappeared into the rear of the apartment.

Peter examined the living room. It was more or less the same shape and dimension as Dina's but its character was completely different. It was more fragile and refined, the objects obviously carefully selected for their beauty and the impression they would make on the visitor. It was not the warm, casual accumulation of living in which Dina nested. He thought it pretentious and began to dislike Mallorey as

much for her taste in furniture as for her automatic refusal to become involved with the problems of Newport Mews.

"It's pretty, isn't it?" Dina said. She, too, had been looking at the furniture. She studied the shells sprayed across the top of the large, square coffee table, admiring the effect and knowing that if she had tried to do the same thing it would have come out looking like a mass of old seashells clumped on a table.

"Dainty," Peter said, giving a twist to the word. Dina eyed him knowingly. He felt uncomfortable in such an obviously feminine apartment, and he quite probably had never been confronted with objects as expensive as these. Malloreys taste was exquisite, without being faddish. It was not an apartment in which Dina would have been comfortable but she could appreciate the personality of the woman who lived here.

"I'm sorry," Malloreys said, coming back into the living room, "but I just wasn't too clear when you knocked on the door."

She sat down in the armchair again and Peter could see that she was completely awake now. Dina noticed that Malloreys had taken the time to darken her eyelashes. She wore no other makeup but she looked beautiful. It was somewhat intimidating to see her so presentable, so effortlessly attractive, and Dina began to sense the enormity of what she and Peter were trying to do. This woman had no need to join in their demonstration. Her life, quite obviously, had no place for such mundane matters.

"I'm aware that it might appear selfish of me," Malloreys said, "not to join in whatever tenants' movement you have going here. And I'm quite aware that there is something not quite right about enjoying the benefits of what others have worked for." Her smile was warm but Peter could read the determination in her eyes. He wondered if he had offended her with that remark about her being in the news. He had only

been stating a fact. He did not see how she could take offense at the simple truth.

"My problem," Mallorey said reasonably, "is that there are other things going on in my life right now that preclude my taking part in this. . . ."

"But other people," Dina interrupted. Mallorey did not let her continue.

"I know, believe me. But you must understand that at the present time I must choose between what is important to me, personally, and what might be important to people I don't know."

"You've made no attempt to know them," Peter said harshly.

Mallorey nodded her head. "True. But circumstances . . . there are private matters. . . ." Her voice trailed away. Why did these people refuse to take the hint? She had been as diplomatic as she could be. "Maybe another time?" she said, trying to remain polite.

"When?" Peter demanded. "The community's needs are right now."

"What community?" Mallorey demanded.

"The people living in this complex."

"Are they a community?" Mallorey asked. "The way it looks. . . ."

"You haven't made an effort. . . ."

"Peter," Dina said, putting a hand on his arm, "she's right."

Peter chewed at the drooping end of his moustache. Mallorey Swann was right, of course. She had sensed that the people who lived here were not a community. It had taken a strenuous campaign to forge them into a fragile alliance for this one, basic action. They had all been victims of the carelessness of the King's Rest owners yet they had not been able, nor wanted, to search each other out and organize themselves. It had taken an outsider to force them to it.

"Nevertheless," Peter said, in the voice he used for bargaining, "in this one matter we are a community. And you'd think that someone like you, used to living in decent surroundings, would be the first to complain."

Mallorey smiled painfully at him. "The truth is," she said, "I don't give a damn about this apartment."

She was tired, so very tired, and she realized that she truly did not care about this place. She could easily have sold the furniture, or put it in storage, long ago. She could have moved to *Moorea Cloud* weeks ago and not divided her life into times with Joshua and times away from Joshua. She knew now that she had been cheating, keeping the apartment as an escape from the death watch and Consuelo's behavior. If she was going to sacrifice a small piece of her life it was more honest to make it a full-time devotion rather than a frightened, weary, half-hearted one. Mallorey thought, with chagrin, that it was the first time she had thought of the death watch as a sacrifice on her part; at the beginning it had seemed so simple, so inevitable.

Dina watched Mallorey's face, seeing her expression change. She realized that the beautiful woman seated in the armchair across from her was deeply involved in something important and that she had just come to a realization, or a decision. It had nothing to do with her and Peter. Mallorey's concentration was intense, her entire being was closed in on itself. Dina was aware of Mallorey's utter separateness. The woman had a life apart, the complexities of which they could not know. It had been foolish coming to her like this, thinking that she was as free as they were to join in this battle. Mallorey Swann did not need the false sense of collective action or the self-indulgent excitement that went with it.

"I see there's going to be a charity tennis tournament," Peter said disdainfully.

"Yes," Mallorey answered.

"You've lent your name to that," Peter said aggressively.

The disgust in his voice was obvious. "Some society doings full of rich folk feeling proud of themselves while the money gets side-tracked into the caviar and champagne."

Mallorey stood. "You contempt is misplaced," she said, the drawl more pronounced now. "You have no idea of what is involved in that tennis tournament."

Dina rose, hoping that Peter would say no more but would leave before making a fool of himself.

"Hell, yes, I know what's involved," Peter said, standing in his turn. "A bunch of big time people thinking they're doing a good deed because they get together and play tennis and get photographed being charitable. And they stick some movie star's name on it as a front." He was in a fury, spitting the words out unrestrainedly. "Meanwhile, there're people who are really hurting. . . ."

Dina saw Mallorey's face, saw the control that was breaking. She saw the enormous strain behind the smooth façade. It was only a glimpse of pain and fatigue but it was enough to move her to grip Peter's hand and pull him from the apartment.

"Come on, let's go," she said to him. Surprised at the firmness of her tone he stopped speaking and followed her.

"I'm sorry we bothered you," Dina said. Mallorey heard the concern in the girl's voice and wondered at it.

"It's just a bad time," she said, answering that concern with an explanation that she did not owe.

They were out the door and it closed behind them. Dina pulled Peter away, down the hall. She did not want him to hear the snap of the lock. She knew that Mallorey would lock the door after them.

"What the hell was all that about?" Peter demanded. "Why did you let her off so easy? She's nothing but a phony rich-bitch." His disappointment was making him cruel. He had hoped that beauty and idealism would have gone together. He could not understand how someone who looked so good, so interesting, could turn out to be nothing.

"She has trouble," Dina said. "If you were less interested in your righteous ideology and your adolescent fantasies and more interested in how people really are, you would have seen it."

"Seen what?" he demanded.

"Pain. And she's dead tired. I feel like we've done worse than intrude. I feel like we were the last straw."

Peter ran his fingers through his hair in exasperation. "You're seeing things," he said. "We could have used her."

"Exactly," Dina agreed. "We could have *used* her. And you started spouting about the tennis tournament. You don't know anything about it except what you saw on television or those flyers they're handing out. Maybe it *is* legitimate."

Peter thought for a moment. "We can use the tennis tournament itself," he said. "We don't need Mallorey Swann. If it's like all those others there'll be TV people there and photographers and newspapers. We'll do the demonstration there, right outside their phony charity playpen."

Dina looked at him with a mixture of despair and admiration. How could he not have felt Mallorey's sincerity, her distress? And how quick he was to sense an advantage, to realize that the tournament was the perfect time and place to make public their complaints against King's Rest.

"Okay, Patton," she said. "you can buy me dinner."

"Patton!" He was half irritated, half flattered. He waited for Dina to continue but she had come to the end of her patience with him. He was so insensitive sometimes. She was beginning to wonder if he was not just another lawyer, after all.

XV

Consuelo held the first drink of the day in her hand, looking with no delight at the orange and red flush of a Tequila Sunrise. She had found herself drinking tequila more and more often these days, as if the pressures of her life were forcing her back toward the remembered habits of her childhood. She had not admitted it to herself but what she really yearned for was beer, a cold, bitter, tingling beer in a glass wet with frost. She knew that if she began drinking beer she would not be able to stop and would balloon into premature overweight. She was built like her mother, that sad, withdrawn woman, beaten down after years of trying to handle her brutal husband and her violent, angry sons. Consuelo's mother had taken to overeating. It was as if a constant filling of her mouth could in some way replenish her emptied heart.

Consuelo gulped at the drink, sickening at the over-sweet taste of orange juice and grenadine. Impatiently, she put the drink aside and poured a shot glass full of straight tequila. She scooped up half a lime, grabbed a salt shaker and trudged out onto the deck.

Joshua was seated in his chair. He did not move but sat, hunched, his shoulders covered by a summerweight blanket. Consuelo darted a glance at him as she passed, seeing his half-shut eyes. He seemed to be staring at a spot on the deck. Briefly, she wondered if he was asleep or daydreaming. It amazed her each day that he had enough strength left for thought.

“Consuelo,” he called softly. She stopped and turned to look at him.

"What do you want?" she asked, ungraciously.

"Don't do it to yourself," he said. His voice was almost a whisper.

"Do what?"

"Drink so much. You're young. Young." The last word was spoken wistfully. She thought he must envy her age, knowing that he was almost finished. It gave her pleasure to know that Joshua, superior Joshua, was reduced to envying his dumb, *chicana* wife.

"I'm old enough," she said and downed half the tequila in the glass. She had meant to sip at it but his very presence provoked her.

"I'm sorry," Joshua said.

Consuelo wondered what he was sorry about. The old man must be sorry to be dying this way. He probably wanted to go out in a more spectacular fashion, in the saddle, probably, or with the yacht exploding around him. Well, there was no help for that. He would die weak and pissing and disgusting to be around.

"I'm sorry it's been so difficult for you," Joshua continued.

Consuelo shrugged. She wanted to sit down but could not. Something about him kept her standing there, like a child being reprimanded.

"I've arranged everything with the lawyers. They'll take care of you," he said.

Consuelo glared at him. She was sure she knew how he had arranged things with the lawyers. He had probably given them instructions to keep her short of cash so that she would not be able to piss it away. Well, it would be her money after he was dead. He had no right to continue controlling her after he was gone. Consuelo wondered if she could hire her own lawyers to sue Joshua's lawyers, to force them to hand over her money. She would worry about it later, after the funeral. Consuelo had great plans for the funeral. She had come to the

conclusion that she would have him cremated the day he died and that would be the end of that.

"You won't be inheriting as much as you thought," Joshua said. His voice was still soft, still a whisper.

"What do you mean?" Consuelo demanded, knowing that her fears were about to be confirmed.

"There's not that much left," he said.

Consuelo flipped the lime overboard, drank down the last of the tequila and then threw the glass after the lime. She stared at the salt shaker in her hand. She could see the clotted salt inside and the grains of rice mixed with it to remove the ocean moisture and keep the salt flowing freely. Somehow, it never worked and they were constantly forced to unscrew the sterling silver top and hit it against a napkin in order to clear the holes. With a shrug Consuelo tossed the salt shaker overboard, too, and then walked over to her husband.

"That was crystal and silver," Joshua said calmly. "I didn't think you cared so little for it." He was looking at her with a turtle stare, his eyelids drooping, the iris unmoving.

"It doesn't matter," Consuelo said. "You're cutting me out of the will, aren't you?"

"No," he said. "It's just that there's not much money left."

Consuelo felt the alcohol running in her blood. She was lightheaded with the first, delicious taint of the tequila. Her anger was very close to the surface, no longer held in check by discretion.

"What did you do with it?" she demanded. "Did you give it away? Malloreys? Is that it?"

"No. Sit down, please. I can't look up at you."

Consuelo pulled the canvas deck chair around until it faced Joshua squarely. She sat down, her plump golden knees almost touching his. They looked like two people about to exchange secrets.

"It costs a lot to live the way we have been," Joshua said.

“You know that.”

“You’re trying to do me in,” Consuelo said angrily.

Joshua smiled bitterly. “You agreed to certain conditions when we married,” he said. “And in the old phrase: ‘the screwing I got wasn’t worth the screwing I got.’ ”

“It’s about Timmons, isn’t it?” Consuelo whined.

“I’m not talking about your nasty little affair with that idiot. The two of you deserved each other, in fact. I’m talking about the public way you went about it.”

“You didn’t stop me,” Consuelo said. “You encouraged it.”

“I haven’t touched you in a long time,” Joshua replied. “And, at that point, nothing could have stopped you. The harm had already been done and I would have looked the perfect fool if I had made a scene. So I condoned it. But that is not what I am talking about, either.”

“What then?” Consuelo did not believe him. Joshua had to be vindictive about the affair. It wasn’t right, she thought; he was only making up things now to absolve himself of responsibility for her behavior.

“It is your entire attitude. It is your refusal to educate yourself in preparation for when you will be alone. It is your continuous rudeness. No, it’s more than rudeness: it’s plain meanness. It’s the way you’re ruining yourself, your health and your looks and your character. You drink too much, my dear wife. You have made yourself into an object of contempt.”

“So you’re cutting me off,” Consuelo said, wanting him to admit it. She looked at his blank face. Only his eyes moved, but so little, so imperceptibly. They glistened beneath the half-open eyelids. He was watching her the way one watches a pesky, unpredictable animal.

“I need a drink,” Consuelo said and began to rise.

“Sit still,” he said, the words cracking in the air. She wondered where he found the energy to speak that way.

Maybe he had been faking his weakness. Maybe there was still some strength left in that body.

"I am going to tell you what you can expect," he said. "The lawyers have their instructions and now you will receive yours."

Consuelo began to pick at a dry scab on her knee. She had cut herself shaving. Her hands seemed to be unsteady almost all the time now.

"You will stop drinking. If you cannot stop drinking you will be put into a hospital and be helped to stop drinking. The payment for that treatment will come out of your allowance."

"Allowance," Consuelo said bitterly.

"Yes. You cannot be trusted to handle money. You are probably an alcoholic, although it might just be spite that got out of hand."

Consuelo felt the anger beginning to break through. "Who's getting the screwing?" she demanded. "Me!"

"Quiet," Joshua said. "You will receive an allowance every month. Any proper human being should be able to survive very nicely on twenty-five hundred dollars a month, even living as unrestrainedly as you've become accustomed to."

"Where will I live?" Consuelo demanded. "You're selling *Moorea Cloud* out from under me!"

"You could not afford to keep *Moorea Cloud*," Joshua said bluntly. "In fact, it's a blessing that I'm dying. I couldn't afford to keep her much longer, either. Now, the allowance will be from the interest on the capital. You understand that, don't you?"

"I don't see why I can't have it all," Consuelo said peevishly.

"There will be no taxes to pay," Joshua continued, as if she had not spoken. "That will be taken care of. You may find a house or an apartment, within reason of course, and it

will be purchased for you. The lawyers will explain the details."

"But what will I do?" Consuelo asked, suddenly aware that her life's work had been to irritate Joshua and with him no longer alive she would be unemployed. It suddenly struck her as funny that the only thing she was trained to do was to bedevil a man.

"Whatever you like," Joshua said. "I hope you will find congenial employment very soon." He smiled slightly and added: "The devil finds work for idle hands."

Consuelo swore at him. She stood and roared profanity in English and Spanish. The decks of nearby boats were suddenly populated with interested listeners. Two of *Moorea Cloud's* crew appeared, watched for a moment and then disappeared again, unwilling to interfere. Joshua sat patiently, letting her ravings wash over him. Finally, the words began to run down. Joshua waited until Consuelo had calmed and then said: "I think I should warn you, so that you make no fuss when it happens, but there are bequests to my former wives."

Consuelo glared at him.

"It's only fair," Joshua said mildly.

Consuelo's hands clenched and she reached toward him, stopping herself with an effort that was visible over her entire body. Her lips were drawn back over her teeth in an animal snarl.

"My funeral," Joshua said. "I don't want one. Just cremate me and do as the lawyers tell you with the ashes. They have instructions."

Consuelo glared at him. She was furious. Joshua was countering her plans even before he died. Well, she would show him: she would give him a fancy funeral and invite all his friends. She would ask many people to make speeches about him. There would be music and flowers and she would weep and scream. She grinned fiercely as an idea struck her. She would have the mortician paint Joshua's dead face like a

whore's. She would have him dead in his casket with the lid open and everybody would see him covered with pancake makeup and eyeshadow and red on his cheeks and lips. They would think him vain even in death. They would remember him like that: made up for a camera even as a stiff.

"I want my ashes scattered at sea from *Moorea Cloud*. My last trip on her. I know it sounds sentimental, and I won't know it's happening, but I want it done."

"Sure," Consuelo said airily. She knew she would be able to find a way to sabotage that, too. She'd put a mariachi band on board, hire those boys from the Club kitchen to play. And they'd make it a party with a lot of booze. And when no one was looking she'd dump the box overboard without opening it. Let him sink to the bottom in one clump of ashes.

"I'll see to it," Consuelo said.

Joshua smiled. "I wish I could be here to see what mischief you cook up," he said. "I know you will do something horrible."

Consuelo nodded and laughed. "You can count on me."

"I know I can," Joshua answered. For a moment he felt immensely pleased with her.

Malloreys came on board carrying a soft-sided suitcase. She purposefully entered the main cabin, marching past Consuelo with a nod and then sitting down next to Joshua. Music filled the cabin. It sounded like Bach. Joshua had always listened to Liszt and Tschaikovsky in his moments of comparative quiet.

"I'm glad you're moving in," Joshua said. He did not seem surprised.

"Shit," Consuelo commented.

"Malloreys to be moved to the forward cabin," Joshua told Consuelo.

Consuelo buried herself further into the couch on which she was curled.

"I have been thinking about old age," Joshua said. Mal-

lorey took his hands gently, trying to warm them between her own. "The Chinese knew how to do it," Joshua said broodingly. "When a man grew old they would put young virgins in his bed to keep him warm during the night. They recognized that 'winter of his years' is not just a metaphor. I'm so damned cold all the time," he added querulously.

"I'm not a virgin," Mallorey said, "but will I do?"

"I'm not an old Chinese," Joshua replied quickly. She felt, under the demurrer, that he was shocked at the offer. It could not have been his moral sense that was offended. It must have been his deep awareness of his own body and his life-long taste for what was most sensual in the mingling of male and female. Mallorey felt a small rise of pride. She had managed to shock Joshua Quick.

"Don't look that way," she said. "It was only an idea."

"I can't help it. My Lord, I haven't felt like this since I was a child and first learned that my parents, too, did that thing."

"That thing?" Mallorey repeated, laughing. "Did it shock you?"

"Of course," Joshua said. "For them, not for me. I loved it and wanted to do it the first time I saw a chap going at a girl. It was the idea that Mum and Da did it. And quite often, too, from the memory of the sounds coming from the paternal bedroom."

"How old were you when you first did it?" Mallorey asked, fascinated and eager to hear the truth behind the mythology.

"Ten. I was ten."

"And the second time?" she asked, laughing at the relish with which he had answered.

"Ten. Same girl. A week later."

"Ask him how many women he's fucked," Consuelo said. Her face looked sodden, as if she had sponged up too much liquid, either alcohol or tears.

"That's not important," Mallorey said. "What was the

most interesting one, that's the question I'd like an answer to."

"They were all interesting, at first. But, present company excepted, I think the most complex was an over-educated Arab princess. She'd been mucked up at Cambridge and the London School of Economics, her head filled with all sorts of nonsense."

"Sexist and racist," Consuelo said. "You know why he married only Latinas? That's the reason."

"You misunderstand, *chica*," Joshua said. "What I meant was that the girl had had so much western culture fed into her that she'd come to believe that was the way to be. As a result she was no longer herself. She'd become a caricature of a lady. When we first crawled into bed it was like being with a snow queen. Then she found herself again. The change was startling, to say the least. Almost put me off my stroke."

Mallorey laughed. The self-congratulatory note in Joshua's voice was unmistakable. He was slightly ridiculous, puffing himself up this way. Mallorey wished that Consuelo had not brought up racism, or sexism. Joshua had the bigotry of his age, attenuated though it might be. It was too late, now, to try to convert him.

"Then there was an American Indian girl. I don't know what the hell tribe she came from. But I had to wear a sweater in bed. She'd go crazy and take after me with her nails. Screamed like a banshee, too. That first time I came out scratched and bloody and damned sore. I learned my lesson."

"You ever make it with a man?" Consuelo asked. Her voice was slurred and ugly.

"Of course," Joshua said blandly. "When I was very young and at sea for long spells, and had no money when we reached port."

"You're bi?" Consuelo asked in amazement.

“Of course not,” Joshua said wearily. “It had to do with being randy, not with anything else. It still amazes me how Americans become so ridiculously confused about sex, even with the supposed easing of sexual standards. They make a system of everything, with proper definitions and rituals of conduct. It’s a pity.”

“What was the most boring you’ve ever had?” Mallorey asked, wanting him to keep talking, wishing that Consuelo would keep quiet and listen. Joshua pondered her question with gentlemanly detachment.

“Most boring? I’d have to think,” he said. “It all got pretty boring after a while. And then it became a search for what would not be boring, rather than just for another quim.” He gazed at Mallorey but his mind was elsewhere.

“I suppose it was a noted French courtesan. I don’t mean that she was a courtesan in the eighteenth century sense, nor even that she was a *demi-mondaine*, as they had at the turn of this century: Maxim’s and the Opera and the horse races and all that. But she was the modern equivalent. She had a reputation as a *locomotive*, that was the phrase in use in the early Sixties. She was a member of that cafe society in Paris that was always flying off to St. Moritz or Rome or Venice. You cannot imagine how terrible she was in bed. Not even just in bed, in the bedroom itself. Once you got her into bed it was sighs and *Mon dieus* and all sorts of carryings-on. If one was naive one could have been fooled into believing that the lady was enjoying herself. But the truth of the matter was that it was the performance one was supposed to admire. The sensual delight there was that she had chosen one for her bed partner in the first place. Everything that came afterward was an awkward necessity. She did expect a token, in the great tradition. Not jewelry. It was more a matter of accommodating her with favors, attending a party or being attentive to her, or meeting people she wanted you to meet, for some obscure reason, business probably. Streetwalkers were less commercial than that woman.”

"What was the most disgusting?" Consuelo asked with ill-concealed avidity.

"The most disgusting are drunk women," Joshua said shortly. "They are always a mess in bed and they have a tendency to smell unwashed."

Consuelo tore herself from the couch and ran from the cabin. They could hear her clattering down the stairs to her cabin below decks.

"The one thing I never found," Joshua said reflectively, ignoring the exit of his wife, "was an ethereal fuck. I thought I almost had it, once. Strangely enough, with an American girl; but she slid into earthiness as things progressed and that was the end of that dream."

Joshua patted Mallorey's hand fondly. She bit her lip, determined not to ask him if she was the one who had deprived him of so rare a treat.

"I want to go to bed," Joshua said. "I'm very tired." The memory of former exertions had evidently taken its toll.

Mallorey rose to help him but he waved her away. "Call Manny," he said.

Mallorey went over to the intercom and buzzed the galley. Manny responded immediately. She watched as he helped Joshua stand and walk to the stairway.

"I can go down the ladder on my own," Joshua said weakly.

"The hell you will," Manny said and lifted Joshua in his arms. Mallorey picked up her suitcase and followed them down the stairway that Joshua insisted on calling by its nautical designation. She followed behind them, waiting until Manny disappeared into the master cabin with a very white-faced Joshua. Then she continued forward, toward the cabin that had been assigned to her.

Consuelo was sitting on the bed, waiting for Mallorey. "What're you trying to pull?" she asked. "Isn't it enough that he's giving you money from *Moorea Cloud*? You got what you came for."

"That's not why I'm here," Mallorey said.

"Then why? You're not in love with that old man."

"Because I'm his friend," Mallorey told her. "Because he doesn't have much longer and I want to be with him so that he has some normal life around him. You're not helping at all. You were all right when it was a question of goading him. But now he needs to have people who care for him and all you do is drink and sulk and try to pick fights."

"I'm his wife, not you," Consuelo said with hate in her voice.

Mallorey shrugged. "You don't act like it. You don't even act like a friend. And I don't care what you want, anymore. I'm no longer interested in not making you uncomfortable or of not hurting your feelings. I think you're a prize bitch."

"He's doing something terrible to me," Consuelo cried. She was weeping yet keeping her voice low so that the sounds would not be heard in the passageway. "He's putting me on an allowance. His lawyers will be in control of my life, people who don't know me, who don't understand what I need or want."

"So you'll find a job, supplement the income and do whatever you want with the money you earn," Mallorey said reasonably.

"Doing what?"

Mallorey raised her hands in a gesture of discouragement. She could handle only one thing at a time, now. Consuelo's worry about her future was understandable, but unseemly.

"Whatever you want to learn to do," Mallorey said with an edge to her voice. "Go back to school."

Consuelo made a rude noise with her pursed lips. "You're a damn goody two-shoes, aren't you?"

Mallorey did not answer her. Consuelo's self-pity and whining were wearing and totally uncalled for. The woman's future was secure. She was healthy and young, and would be a lot healthier and look a lot younger when she cut

down on her alcohol. She had nothing to worry about, except being alone. Mallorey did not think she would be alone for long. Consuelo needed someone to invent her life for her. She needed a man to resent. Mallorey thought she would find someone very easily: there were many men around who thought passivity and petulance charming. She could see Consuelo remarrying a rich man very quickly after Joshua died. The man would think Consuelo loved him for himself, not his money, since she had an income of her own. He would not understand until it was too late that Consuelo would depend on him for everything: for financial support, for her ideas, for a target.

"I don't want you moving in," Consuelo hissed. "Go away!"

"I'm moved in," Mallorey said bitingly. "Do you want to take it up with Joshua right now?"

Consuelo looked at Mallorey for a long moment and then retreated from the cabin. She felt as if this was another battle she had lost. Nothing she did turned out right. Her entire life was a disaster and would continue to be so. She felt ensnared, held by lines of force coming from sources she could not understand. She had thought the marriage to Joshua would free her from the world of her friends, would free her from an early wedding and early children and the dull inevitability of years spent with a man who would ignore her everywhere but in bed, yet who would keep a strict, jealous watch on her doings. It was supposed to have been different with Joshua but she had been trapped here, too. It was a gentler trap, the bars and gratings padded with luxury. Yet once the luxury had been accepted, had become a necessity, the camouflage had worn off and she had had to face the truth: the maze she had entered was made of silk, yet its tensile strength was as unbreakable as any other.

"I want out," Consuelo whispered to herself, knowing that the outside was frightening and that she did not dare the

adventure. She saw her destiny as clearly as Mallorey had and felt sorrowfully reassured. It would be paralyzing, but it would be safe.

Alec did not want an audience for the dive. He had been having premonitions of death and he did not want people staring at him, catching him in a moment of weakness and fear. It would be too embarrassing if he were to back down in front of his friends.

He had driven up and down the coast, searching for the right place to perform the dive. He had looked for the right cliff with the proper amount of deep water at its foot. He had driven almost as far north as Santa Barbara, cursing and blessing the accidents of geology that had formed the mountains leading down to the Pacific. There were few honest cliffs there. He had found two or three proper formations north of Malibu, but they jutted up out of gentle, sloping beaches. He had found one tide pool, but it was not deep enough.

Uneasily he admitted to himself that he would be forced to jump from a section below Palos Verdes where the crumbling mountains, eaten away by the ages and the Pacific tides, were waiting for an excuse to fall into the sea. He had climbed down the slope to the water, grateful that it was so easy and that there were so many foot and hand holds.

It was no longer a true cliff. Slides had piled up boulders, giant clumps of rock nestling against each other. At the water's edge he had looked up to estimate how high the best diving platform was. He reckoned it at forty feet and shuddered. Then he had entered the water, stroking powerfully downward for a minute. He had hit on a geological oddity here, something akin to a sink-hole. There were still fathoms of water beneath him after the long minute, and all worries of hitting bottom and smashing himself to blood and meat vanished.

Alec surfaced and treaded water, looking up toward the boulders from which he might jump. As he inspected the position of the platform he realized that he would not be able to simply dive. He would have to push himself outward, away from the rock face. He wondered if he would be strong enough to thrust his body far enough away from the cliff.

He swam back and climbed up to the platform. Once there he sat down, snuggling into the overhanging rock above, his feet dangling freely in space when he tried to stretch his legs out in front of him. He had thought that the little platform would be wider than it actually was.

The sun dried him of sea water and perspiration. He tilted his head back and took the sun on his closed eyelids. "I should have brought some lotion," he thought. He was tanned to a copper color and lately had begun to worry about skin cancer. He realized that he'd been worrying about a lot of things lately, all of them having to do with his health.

"I feel all right," he reassured himself, but the worry was still there. He supposed it was his age. He had begun feeling old, on certain days. Perhaps it was not so much feeling old as no longer feeling young. He saw himself in the mirror and wondered at the changes in his body. The muscles were still strong but the skin covering them had relaxed, as if tired of the job it had done so long. There was a welt of fat at his hip-bones, even though he was not overweight.

Alec slapped one thigh, feeling the shock of the blow reverberate through him. "Loose," he thought, with surprise. A few years ago the vibrations would have not reached as far up his torso as they now did. The force of the slap would have been absorbed at the point of impact, the resilience underneath able to withstand, and contain, an enormous amount of punishment.

"Why are we still doing this?" Alec asked himself. He suddenly hated Viveca for keeping up the routine. For the first time in a long while he thought about his wife in more

searching terms than he was used to doing. She was aging, too. It was not that she had lost her beauty; it had simply changed. She was a handsome woman, a challenge to any man who looked at her. There was something awesome about her physical presence. She ruined it with her flimsy intrigues, her gossip, her avidity for easy sensation. She could have been a Juno, strong, serene and wise. Instead, she reduced herself to bitchiness.

Alec supposed she had not had another man in a while. There was nobody around to fit her tastes. She had always been reserved and civilized and even when she had begun taking lovers with defiant frequency she had never coupled with anyone unworthy of her. David Nash might have tempted her, but he had become a member of the loose circle of acquaintances who passed as friends this season.

Alec wondered, for the first time, why it was that they had no true friends, people whom they could consider as almost family, people with whom they could share their time without slipping into the boredom of familiarity. It was not as if they had outgrown the openness necessary for making friends, and they had certainly been back long enough to have developed a circle of stability around themselves. Yet it had not happened. Their openness was not warmth; it was uncaring.

“My fault, too,” Alec thought. “I should have done something about it.”

For a moment he felt absolute loneliness. It was a sensation he had not experienced very often in his life. He found himself wishing for a friend or two, men with whom he could drink and talk, men with whom he could exchange the hearty jargon of sports and business and with whom spontaneous outbursts would not be out of place. Men with whom he could let himself go into the silliness of one or two drinks too many and who would not think the less of him for it. Those men would have wives of weight and merit, women with

whom he could be flirtatiously brotherly, women with whom there would never be second thoughts, or sexual musings.

"God, I wish I could take it easy for a while," Alec thought. The feeling settled in for a stay, bringing with it an entire inventory of discontent. They truly did not need any more money: Alec knew he could stop working without jeopardizing their basic existence. They might have to cut back, but it would be to a level enjoyed by few people in the world. They might have to curtail the careless luxury with which they surrounded themselves. Viveca could no longer throw parties for no reason whatsoever. It might be a good thing, at that: a party in honor of strangers or of a casual incident had no meaning. It was not as if they ever celebrated anything. They seemed to give parties in order to surround themselves with a fiction of movement, a facsimile of events.

"All those strangers," Alec muttered, imagining money and time scattered senselessly. "I don't even have a good time anymore."

Alec shook his head, realizing how tired he was of his own stories, how desperate he must be if he was forced to embellish his personal history with exaggerations and improvements of the truth. He decided, at that moment, that he would never tell another story about his adventures in Africa. That was a part of his life that was finished.

"I'm as bad as Viveca," he thought. "I use the past as a substitute for an interesting life." He wondered what it was that had stopped him from living in the present as he used to. The answer came to him with bitter force: he had been reluctant to force Viveca into giving up her ties to the past. He had felt sorry for her, ridiculously guilty for having taken her from her home, for having moved to this new country: his country.

"But we agreed," he realized. He remembered how amazed he had been at her courage, her realism, at her ability to see the future course of events unlike most of her compa-

riots. They had decided to get out early, before it became dangerous, both politically and economically.

"That's all gone," Alec told himself. "I shouldn't even be thinking about it."

He blinked his eyes open and stared out at the sea. The afternoon was well advanced now. Soon the sun would be floating just above the horizon. The sky would turn brighter, becoming a deeper blue before it shimmered down into red. Alec crawled to the edge of the platform and looked down at the water far below. "I was right," he thought. "Forty feet."

He measured the distance outward from the cliff, searching for the exact spot where the water turned dark at the sharp edge of the sink-hole. "Deceptive," he told himself. "It's farther out than it looks."

He did not want to do this dive. The desire to give it all up swept over him. For an instant he struggled with it, ashamed in his manhood for what he thought of as cowardice. Then, with relief, he rid himself of that idea. He knew it was not cowardice: he had done far more dangerous things in his life, both foolishly and with careful planning. It was simply that he was fed up.

Alec rose with a groan, brushing at his back and legs to remove the small particles of rock and mica that glittered on him. He looked down at the water again, taking one last sighting. He knew he would dive. He knew he would be hurt this time.

"Then I'll be shut of it," he thought, not realizing that he had used an expression from his youth.

Alec climbed back up the cliff face and retrieved his clothes from the back of the car. He stood on one leg, pulling on the linen trousers, shifting legs as he settled the pants over his sun-dried bathing trunks. He put on the light windbreaker that he wore on his bare skin, zipping it up half-way. He smoothed his hair with his two hands and then slid into the sun-heated car.

“Tomorrow,” Alec thought. “I’ll do the dive tomorrow. Witness, I’ll need a witness. Not more than one or two, just to keep it private. In her mood, Viveca’s liable to say I didn’t do it if there are no witnesses. Damn her, anyway.”

Alec pondered the matter of who he might ask to accompany him for the dive. “Someone who won’t panic,” he thought, fatalistically, accepting the idea that he was going to need help afterward. He thought, ruefully, that he was planning his accident with the care he usually reserved for planning a success.

“David?” Alec thought. “He’s calm.” Alec admitted to himself that he did not trust David Nash to jump into the water and save him from drowning.

“Timmons?” Alec shuddered. The boy was an athlete but he was not someone to whom Alec wanted to deliver the responsibility for his well-being.

“Sonny DeLane?” Alec thought and immediately relaxed. The big man was impossible and would probably think about his contractual obligations and his own safety before panicking. Yes, Sonny would panic; then his instincts would take over and he would do the right thing.

“And Selena,” Alec added, surprised that he thought of a young woman as an assurance of his safety. Alec admitted to himself that there was more to it than just an appreciation of her strength. He smiled wryly, knowing that he wanted to show off for her.

“Getting rabbity in my old age,” he thought. “But I’m not *that* old,” he reproved himself, vanity taking over from good sense. “And she swims like a fish. I saw her in the pool.”

He remembered the flash of legs and arms and hair, the sleek, strong body cutting through the water, swimming laps with serene determination. She had played a game of tennis and then reappeared in a racing suit, going into the pool with the neat efficiency characteristic of her.

“Just went about her business,” Alec said aloud. He had

enjoyed the sight, had sat watching her for twenty minutes as she swam back and forth. She had climbed out of the pool and stood dripping in the late afternoon sun, wringing out the long hair that streamed like a flow of taffy down her back. Then she had bound her hair in a twist of towel, the white terrycloth contrasting with the honey color of her body, the caramel gleam of the suit.

Alec could feel himself hardening. He was surprised, and then amused. "Like a damn adolescent," he thought, "catching that first whiff of girl smell." He found himself wanting to run his hands over Selena, to smooth the golden skin, to brush the fine, golden hairs at her thighs. He wondered what all that long hair would feel like, fluttering over his face. He wondered if it was cool, or whether it held the heat of her body and the sun.

He felt cramped inside his trousers and shifted position to ease himself. He was enjoying the sensation until it came to him that this excitement was serious. This was no automatic stirring, no casual, chemical reaction, easily felt, easily forgotten.

"Hell," he thought, "what am I thinking about? She's got Timmons. That boy reeks of sex. He must do all right by her. What would she want with me, anyway?" He remembered her reluctance, her shyness on the boat, the way she had refused the contact of his arm the night that Timmons had taken off with Joshua Quick's wife. "Spirit and pride," he thought, ridiculously pleased with her, as if she belonged to him, or as if she was his own daughter.

"My daughter," he thought with a vague, horrified sensation in his stomach. "Maybe that's it." He was still erect.

It came to him that he wanted to fly. He wanted to be in a light plane, alone, over the water with only a smudge at the horizon to show where land was. He wanted to feel the heavy drone and vibration of the engines, wanted to feel the pressure and release of the seat underneath him, wanted the

fatigue in his legs, the aching cramp in his arms.

“Go out to Burbank Airport,” he thought, “rent a plane for a couple of hours.” The idea was appealing, and it was frightening, too. Alec suddenly knew that it was the wrong idea for this moment in his life. If he got into a plane right now, the way he was feeling, he might simply head out to sea, or inland, toward the desert, and keep on going. His credit cards were in his wallet along with about a hundred dollars in cash. He needed nothing else. No toothbrush, no dufflebag full of clothes and underwear.

“Plastic funding,” he thought, “the middle-aged man’s letter of credit.” He wondered, fleetingly, if Selena might like to take off with him.

“Damn fool,” he said to himself. “Forget this nonsense.”

Alec pulled the car over to the curb and parked it in front of a neighborhood bar. It was not his neighborhood, it was not a bar where he was known, but it didn’t matter. He wanted the surroundings, the beer smell, the serious drinkers, the muttered conversations and occasional public explosions of indignation. He wanted other men around him, men who made no pretense of drinking for a reason, for sociability, for the ritual of the cocktail shaker. He just wanted a drink in the presence of people with basic problems to which there were basic solutions, or even no solution at all.

Then he realized what he was doing and became ashamed. “Slumming,” Alec thought, disgusted with himself. It was one of the reasons he had left Africa: he had found himself becoming patriarchal and contemptuous and it had not sat well with his conscience, steeped as it was in the murky waters of American ethics. Maybe that was why they had settled in Southern California. It had seemed to him, after the rigid culture of South Africa, that there was tolerance for eccentricity here. It was only later, after getting to know the place, that he had realized that the culture was just as rigid.

Hedonism, freedom and the study of the self followed inevitable pathways here. Some of those pathways were incredibly limiting.

Alec gave up the idea of a drink and turned the car away from its parking space. It was rush hour and he was forced to accommodate himself to the surge and hesitation of the traffic. The trip back to the marina should have taken only a quarter of an hour but he found himself, thirty minutes later, still caught in the left-turn lane, waiting out an onslaught of cars coming in the opposite direction.

He caught sight of Selena Clarke in one of the passing cars. She stared straight ahead, concentrating on the driving, or on herself, with no thought to the cars around her. She went by too quickly for him to call to her. For a moment he was filled with jealousy at her self-sufficient air and then, in a prim reaction, he wondered what she was doing, and where she was going, without her husband.

XVI



It was nine o'clock before Selena showed up, strolling calmly to where the two men were impatiently waiting for her. Sonny DeLane had wanted to bring along one of his ladies, feeling that any event was incomplete if he did not have an audience for whatever he did, even if it was simply being an audience, himself. He had tried to convince Alec, but the man had been adamant.

"No outsiders," Alec had said brusquely. "If I'm going to break my neck I don't want a stranger watching."

Sonny had grumbled but acquiesced, for he was feeling proud that Alec Bost trusted him enough to take part in the ceremony. Sonny saw it as a ceremony: he would not have agreed to come if he thought it was only a stunt. Stunts were things Sonny did to earn money. He had ridden an elephant in a circus, he had tossed out baseballs, he had been photographed eating any number of strange and indigestible foods, he had judged beauty contests, he had crowned more "misses" than a botany text could supply flowers for, he had stood at attention as various kinds of military formations had marched past him. Stunts were always done in front of a camera while lots of locals milled about pretending to be important. This was something else. Sonny thought of his part in Alec's dive as akin to being best man at a wedding, or like a coach giving moral support and last minute instructions to a team. He was there to observe, give advice and applaud. It was not a bad part to play.

Selena had tried to avoid making a decision. She had been intrigued and puzzled when Alec invited her to watch the dive, thinking it might be a come-on. She had promised nothing, saying only that she might be there if she was not too busy.

Alec had not pressured her. He had merely repeated the invitation, adding that he would appreciate it, as a favor, if she would join Sonny DeLane in witnessing the dive. Selena had heard something in his voice as he spoke, something that she could not name but that jarred her. And so, this morning, arriving early at David Nash's office, she had put aside her work, told David that she was taking the morning off without giving him any further explanation and had driven over to Palos Verdes, following the directions that Alec had given her and that she had written on the back of an envelope.

She had refrained from giving David Nash any details of where she was going because she knew that he would want to accompany her. Her instincts told her that Alec did not want a larger audience. She pondered this as she drove toward Palos Verdes. Then, when she saw the cliffs, she realized what it was that she had heard in Alec's voice: fear; Alec was afraid.

It shocked her that he should have asked her to witness his fear. She did not understand why she had been chosen. He had always been friendly, had always smiled warmly at her. In some ways he had treated her like a child, or, at least, as a person he did not take seriously.

There had been that evening in the restaurant, the evening that Timmons had so publicly humiliated her. Alec had tried to put his arm around her but Selena could not remember if he had touched her before Timmons began acting up or if he had waited until it happened. No matter. Selena still thought of Alec as a comfortable, only slightly flirtatious man. A warm man. She owed him something for his gesture on that evening. He had tried to give her support; she could only return the favor.

"Sorry I'm late," she said.

"That's okay," Alec answered. "I'm not all that hot to do this. The delay was welcome."

"You want a drink first?" Sonny DeLane asked, reaching for the sterling silver flask he had begun to carry. He found it less conspicuous than keeping a bottle and set-ups in his dressing room or in his car.

"No, I need all my reflexes clear," Alec said. He stared down the cliff at the platform waiting for him. He was wearing only his swim trunks.

"Where's Viveca?" Selena asked, surprised not to see her. She would have thought that Alec's wife would have wanted to be here to witness her husband's stunt, or his failure.

"She's not coming," Alec said flatly. The tone of his voice warned Selena not to pursue the matter.

Alec had not told Viveca he would be diving today. He had kept his plans secret, allowing her to taunt him with her silence, her cynical glances, her chatter about other matters. She had kept the pressure on him by deliberately not mentioning her challenge, expecting him to announce, in exasperation, or defiance, that the stunt was set for the next day, or the next week. This time Alec did not want her present. For the first time he felt that the challenge was for him, alone, and had nothing to do with Viveca. If he had continued thinking it was still a part of their marital war then it would have been foolish, and even unnecessary. Now it was simply foolish but he could not allow himself to escape the danger.

"Well," he said reluctantly, "let's get on with it."

"What do you want me to do?" Selena asked.

"I want you two to climb down with me and place yourselves at the water's edge. You'll see the spot when you get down there. You can't miss it."

"Then what?" Sonny asked. "Should I bring my camera? I've got a new Nikon that's fantastic."

"The hell with the camera," Alec said. "Just watch the dive. If something goes wrong, I don't want you holding on to something you're afraid to drop." His words trailed away.

Selena and Sonny DeLane looked at each other. "Are you sure you want to go through with this?" Sonny asked.

"Shit, no, I don't want to go through with this," Alec exploded. "But I'm going to." He rubbed his forehead as if he could feel a headache coming on. "You better take your shoes off," he said to Selena. His voice was full of irritation. "You can't climb in those platform sandals."

"I've some sneakers in the car," she said. "Just give me a minute." Selena went back to the car and changed her shoes. She felt reluctant, undecided about whether to stay. She looked at the two men standing with their backs to the cliff, ignoring the climb and the ocean below. "My God," she thought, "he's in the wrong mood for it." Making up her mind, Selena took off the dress she was wearing, emerging from her clothes in a bra and underpants that could have passed for a bikini. She looked down at herself and the realization came to her: "I knew I was going to come," she thought. She shook her head at the perversity and wisdom of her instincts, and walked back over to the cliff's edge.

"Okay," she said, "I'm ready."

The two men looked at her, Sonny with eyes that were speculative for just a moment until he remembered what they were here for, Alec with appreciation for her forethought. He did not know that her costume was not a bathing suit. He thought that she had efficiently planned what she would wear and approved of the choice.

"Very nice," he said, nodding at the pale turquoise outfit. "Almost worth doing this number just to look at that."

"Keep your mind on what you have to do," Selena suggested. "You're going to need all your concentration."

"Right," Alec said. He led the way down to the first

clump of rocks, showing them the hand and foot holds they would use as they followed him.

It took them several minutes to lower themselves to the platform. Alec stood there alone, pointing out the path they should take to bring them to the edge of the sink-hole. Selena and Sonny DeLane clambered down, passing Alec without looking at him. Both of them were beginning to sense the impropriety of staring at him while he prepared himself for what he was about to do. Alec's eyes were open but he did not seem to be looking at the cliff or the ocean or either of his two witnesses. His head was cocked to one side, as if he was listening to something. His expression was completely removed. Selena recognized the look: she had seen it on Timmons' face before each of the races he had run. It was the look of a man gathering all his powers of concentration, reaching down into himself in an attempt to locate the core of his psychological strength. Selena turned her eyes away, not wishing to intrude as Alec collected himself.

Sonny was discovering that a public exhibition could be a very private thing. It was a new idea for him and he dismissed it as quickly as the understanding came to him. There was no place in his life for modesty or contemplation.

They reached the sink-hole. Selena removed her sneakers and stood squarely in the water. It covered her feet up to the ankles. "Don't you want to take off your shoes?" she asked Sonny. "Just in case?"

"Jeezus," Sonny said and slipped off his loafers, placing them high on a rock behind him. "What are we doing here?"

"How about your shirt?" she suggested.

"The hell with that. Nothing's going to happen."

Selena nodded. "You're right." She finally looked up at Alec perched forty feet above them. "Is that hole deep enough?" she called.

"Yes," he shouted back. "I tried it yesterday, just to see."

And it's high tide. Gave myself every advantage."

"Just checking," Selena said with a careless wave of her hand.

Selena and Sonny looked down at the sink-hole. "You know how to swim, right?" Selena asked.

"Yeah."

They looked up at Alec and waited.

"Sonny," Alec called, "you keep your eyes on me every second I'm off the cliff. Selena, you watch the water and spot where I go in."

"You got it, buddy," Sonny boomed out. He had reverted to his selling voice, as if he could convince Alec, or himself, of the legitimacy of what they were all doing here.

"Okay. Just a second. I'm going to do it now," Alec said. He backed up from the edge of the platform and tried to quiet his nerves. He had spent all of yesterday doing the dive over and over in his head, rehearsing the approach, the concentration, the push off from the cliff until he had it firmly entrenched in his reflexes. He thought he knew exactly what it should feel like, how much tension there should be, how strong a leap would be necessary. Viveca had tried to talk to him, to pull him out of his seeming withdrawal, but he had not allowed her to get through to him.

Viveca had finally given up. Alec did not know that Viveca thought he had found out about Timmons and the motel room and that he was punishing her. Or, worse, that he had finally had enough and was planning to do something about it.

Alec moved to the edge of the platform and positioned himself with his toes curling over the sharp rocks. He took a deep breath, then another. He picked a spot in the water, a target point in the shifting dark blue beneath him. He went completely still.

Sonny watched the large, yet startlingly fragile body soar from the cliff face. Alec was reaching for space. It looked as

if he were trying to fly away from the rocks. Then he was falling, his body tilting forward just enough to aim him toward the center of the sink-hole. Sonny watched him fall, never taking his eyes away. He could not really comprehend what he was witnessing. He knew that the platform from which Alec had jumped was high, but he had not realized how high. The dive seemed to take forever, yet it was not more than two seconds before Alec touched the water.

Selena spotted the place where Alec hit. A spray of water greeted his entry into the sink-hole. The water rose in the air, held there for a moment and then began to subside.

“You see it?” Sonny asked in a frantic voice.

“Yes, I’ve got it,” Selena answered.

They waited.

“He’s not coming up,” Sonny said. His voice was tight and panicky. .

“Another second,” Selena said. “Let’s not ruin it for him.”

They waited.

“Shit,” Sonny said and dived into the water. Selena followed him. They swam quickly toward the spot each had chosen as the target area. They were ten feet apart when they reached it.

“Here,” Sonny called.

“No, here,” Selena answered.

“Me first,” Sonny said and disappeared beneath the cloudy waters. Selena counted the seconds. She reached “one thousand ten” when Sonny reappeared, snorting and coughing. “Couldn’t find him,” he said.

“Okay,” Selena said and arched downward, feeling the momentary sting as the salt water hit her unprotected, open eyes. Then the sting disappeared and she continued kicking her way down, searching through the gloom. Small clusters of bubbles burst from her nose as she let the air out. She felt the pressure in her ears but ignored it. “Calm, calm, calm,”

she chanted silently. She stopped diving and balanced herself on the water's pressure, holding herself suspended in the somber silt. She could see odd shapes in the water and tried to decipher them. Finally she caught sight of a figure, lost it, then found it again. Her throat and chest were beginning to ache. She swam toward the figure, hooked her arm around it and began to kick upward.

He was heavy. It seemed to her that his weight was pulling her down and the hold she had on him was awkward. She was dragging him by the neck and it was not working. Every kick of her legs seemed futile. The need to inhale was torturing her.

Selena shifted her hold on him. Her arm swept down and slid across his chest so that she was grasping him under the armpit. She began to make more headway now. She could see the circle of pure light approaching, slowly, so slowly that it seemed like a tease: there for the taking if she could only reach it. The surface was near but the light deceptive so that she really could not tell how much further she had to climb. She felt Alec kicking slowly. His added power helped. The water began to thin around her, lightening its wringing hold on her chest.

They kicked up into sunlight. Selena gasped, taking a knife of air into her struggling lungs. Alec was choking and spewing. She held him up and then Sonny was beside them, grabbing on to one of Alec's arms.

Alec shrieked: "My arm!"

Sonny let go and fastened on to Alec's swimming trunks. There was a confusion of grips and pawings around Alec's body. Selena pulled away and then returned, taking Alec under the chin and turning him on his back. "You take his butt," she said. "I need your kicking power."

They swam toward the shore. Sonny was the first to stand. He lifted Alec out of the sink-hole and into the shallow basin at the edge of the cliff. Selena dragged herself up beside

Alec. His eyes were open and he was shaking his head from side to side.

“Fucking arm!” he gasped. “Broke my fucking arm!”

Sonny squatted beside Alec and began to feel the limp arm. Alec groaned as Sonny’s fingers met the small knot of bone and punctured muscle that bulged beneath the skin.

“Not good,” Sonny said. “We’re going to have to get you up the cliff right away. Can you climb?”

“I have to, don’t I?” Alec replied. He was shivering.

“Yeah, buddy, you sure do. You want to rest before we start up?”

“A minute.” They sat silently. “Okay,” Alec said finally, “let’s get going.”

Selena put on her shoes and then led the way, pausing every ten feet to look down at the two men. Alec was below her with Sonny directly behind him, his hefty body in his streaming clothes bracing Alec as he climbed.

Selena reached the platform and kept going, perching above the two men while they rested in the clear space.

“Hurts like a son of a bitch,” Alec said. He seemed strangely glad about it, even though he was in pain. She wondered how he could feel glad about a near disaster. “Let’s keep going,” Alec said. “It feels like it’s going to bust through.”

They climbed, Alec sweating and gasping occasionally, reserving his words and curses for later, knowing that he had to keep his strength and attention on the rocks under his one hand and on the way he held himself against the cliff wall.

Selena reached the top and lay down, her head and arms protruding over empty space, ready to catch hold of Alec the moment he came into view. One hand appeared. She saw him searching for a hold and said, quietly: “Ten inches to your right. Stretch your fingers. That’s it. There’s a good hold for your right foot directly beneath it. Just bend your knee half way.”

Alec followed instructions, trusting her absolutely. He was in a strange state. He had been close to drowning, shocked into paralysis by the pain of the arm breaking. Under water he had found himself unable to move, unable to make any purposeful gestures toward saving himself. Then Selena had appeared. He had felt her take him by the throat and had wanted to tell her that it was too late, that he could not hold his breath any longer. He had seen her struggling to bring them to the surface, had known that he was too heavy for her. He had wanted to reach up and break her grip on him. And then he had known that if he touched her hand he would have held on to her so strongly that she would drown with him. And so he had not moved his hand but had allowed her to labor at dragging him upward. He had watched and felt her entire body toiling in the water. And then she had put her arm around him and he had found himself helping, kicking as best he could. He had tried not to inhale any water, although there was no air left in his lungs. The ascent had taken forever, but he had not cared. In those few moments he had felt completely dependent on her, more trusting than he had ever been with another human being. The feeling had lasted through the climb up the cliff. There was Sonny beneath him, pushing and maneuvering, talking him up the cliff, joshing and swearing. He had not minded the other man calling him "buddy" even though that was a word he hated. He had followed instructions, waiting for the other man to approve each hand hold he found before putting his full weight on it. His left arm had hung useless, painful, distracting and yet he had been able to feel thankful that it was his left arm, for he was right-handed.

Selena helped Alec over the top of the cliff, checking to see that Sonny DeLane was close behind. Then she followed Alec over to his car. He was leaning against the fender, looking down at the broken arm in fascination.

"Where's the nearest hospital?" Selena asked.

"I don't know," Sonny said. "There's the para-medics at the marina."

"Too far and too long to wait," Selena said.

"We could drive to a phone booth and ask information," Sonny suggested.

"Okay. We'll follow you."

"I'll lock up." Sonny went to Alec's automobile and found his keys and wallet. He locked the car quickly and gave the things to Selena. "You hold these," he said. Then he helped Alec into the back seat of the LTD. "You sit on the right side, buddy," Sonny said. "Lean to your right. We don't want you falling over on your left arm."

Selena watched the way Sonny handled the other man. He was nervous but managed to do everything that had to be done, not hesitating to lift Alec, to shift him around until he was safely seated, braced against the back corner of the seat.

"Don't lose me," Sonny said.

"I won't," Selena answered.

She drove as smoothly as she could, glancing in the rear view mirror from time to time to check on Alec. He was holding his left wrist with his right hand, as if he could take some of the terrible pressure off the broken bone by that feeble embrace. His eyes met hers in the mirror.

"Thanks for saving my ass," Alec said.

"My pleasure," Selena replied.

"It was a hell of a dive, wasn't it?" he asked.

"It was a beauty," she agreed. "The prettiest thing I've ever seen." She felt herself becoming excited now that it was all over. She realized that she had deferred her emotions, deliberately postponing them until it was all over.

"It felt like flying, at first," Alec said. His eyes were feverish with pain and he seemed determined to talk. "And then I was falling. It was like every nightmare you've ever had. The water wasn't getting any nearer and then it was getting near so fast I couldn't believe it. It felt like hitting a

wall when I went in. My arm wasn't quite straight. I should have held it straighter."

"It was beautiful," Selena assured him. "You ask Sonny. He watched you all the way down. I only saw when you hit. It was like a big flower opening up, all sparkly and moving. Water petals, that's what it looked like."

"There's Sonny," Alec said. He had caught sight of the other man running from his car to a telephone booth. Selena pulled over behind Sonny's car and waited. The man talked quickly into the telephone and then trotted over to Selena's side of the car.

"Not more than a mile from here," he said. "Go straight down this street and turn right on Clearwater."

"You coming with us?" Selena asked.

"Yes, but just in case you lose sight of me. . . . How you doing?" he asked Alec.

"Never better. That was some dive, wasn't it?"

"Buddy, I've never seen anything like it," Sonny said with hearty dishonesty. "You looked like a bird." He recognized the pain on Alec's face. "Let's get you to the hospital."

"One thing," Alec said, stopping Sonny before he could return to his car. "Don't call Viveca. Not yet."

"Anything you say, buddy," Sonny promised.

"That was some dive, wasn't it?" Alec repeated again.

"Yeah, buddy," Sonny answered him, anxious to get back to his car, to get this man to a hospital, to be rid of him. "It was some dive."

"You know what?" Alec said, knowing that he could not hold out against the pain much longer. "That bitch is going to have to go some to top this."

They took x-rays and cheerfully announced that it wasn't that bad at all. They gave him morphine and put him under for half an hour with sodium pentathol because he refused a more serious anesthetic. Alec did not know that he shrieked

and wept when they set his arm. They plastered him up into a stiff white sausage that weighed and drew from the moment he awoke. They wanted to keep him overnight, but Alec refused. He told them he wanted to go home, to his own bed. They let him go with a warning not to drink alcohol, and with the loan of a hospital gown to wear.

Alec paid the hospital bill with his Master Charge card. The hospital would have accepted American Express, but Alec did not want them to see that he had a gold card. He was afraid they would charge him more.

Sonny had left but Selena had waited all through the afternoon and into the early evening. She watched Alec walking toward her and ran to take his arm. "You okay?"

"Yeah. I want to get my car."

"No," she said, "I'll take you back to pick up your clothes, but you're not driving tonight."

Alec sighed and nodded. "Okay, I guess you're right."

They drove back to Palos Verdes and Alec dressed himself, locking the car again. "What do you bet the cops have it towed away?" he asked.

"Two dollars and fifty cents says they don't," Selena answered. "That's all the change I have on me."

"You had anything to eat?" Alec asked.

"In the hospital cafeteria. It was just as bad as it's supposed to be."

"Let's have dinner," Alec said. "I don't want to go home right now. I want. . . ." He stopped. It suddenly came to him what he wanted and he knew that he was determined to have it. More than determined: he was destined to have Selena. If not Selena, someone else, but preferably Selena. He did not ask himself where and how he would find another woman. He did not wonder if Selena wanted him. He simply marched straight forward, mindless, ignoring the pain in his arm, the slurry feeling in his head from the morphine, all questions of propriety, of logistics.

"What is it?" Selena asked.

"I want to have dinner," Alec said stubbornly. The other would follow in its own time.

"Okay, don't get all upset," Selena said. "Where do you want to eat?"

"Anywhere that's not in the marina."

Selena nodded. She thought he looked pale and distraught and could not imagine why. Perhaps it was simply a reaction to the accident and the drugs they had given him. "God knows he's got a right to have a reaction," she thought. She drove him to a restaurant that promised quality by the design of its façade but turned out to be just another steak restaurant once they were inside.

"Have a drink," Alec said.

"No, I don't think so."

"I'm going to have a drink," Alec said.

"Are you allowed to with all those drugs they gave you?" Selena asked.

"The hell with that. I need a drink. Something I can taste and not that vodka crap we're always sipping."

He ordered a scotch and water and Selena finally agreed to have a gimlet. She liked the greenish color of that drink and it seemed harmless enough.

Alec smiled grimly at Selena. "I want to eat real food," he said. "I've been eating through a veil. Feeling through one, too."

They ordered dinner and Alec gulped at it. Selena had to cut his steak for him and he cursed his arm, dully.

"Does it hurt?" she asked.

"Yes, it hurts," Alec replied and then said no more about it. He piled condiments on his food and chewed his steak with noisy pleasure. Selena watched him and did not feel put off by his vulgarity. It seemed right to her that this man should wallow in his food. It seemed reasonable that he should take a second drink. She felt his impatience. It was as if he could not eat fast enough, could not bear to linger over his meal. It was

obvious that he was enjoying the dinner but he was not savoring it: he was diving into the food as he had dived into the water that morning.

Selena pecked at her own meal, feeling that there was too much food on her plate. The gimlet had gone to her head, completely removing the guard she had placed on her feelings. She was tired. The day had been long and filled with strong emotions. For the first time in years Selena had the feeling that she had accomplished something on her own. All her humiliation, her dislike of Timmons, her driving around, had been a protest. Even that brief episode with David Nash had been only an escape. Today she had committed a positive act and the very fact of doing it had changed her view of the world, and of herself.

"Selena," Alec said. His voice was hoarse. She looked up at him and saw that he was staring at her with glittering eyes. He reached for her hand and held it. She could feel the heat in his fingers.

"Oh," Selena said, startled, and then, in a matter-of-fact voice, she said: "Do you want to leave?" She was remembering how it had felt, dragging him out of the water. Now, with the heat of his body warming hers, what had been a desperate, cold struggle became sensual in the remembering. She no longer saw him as an older man.

"Let's go," Alec said, chafing at the waiter's delay in picking up the credit card he had placed on the table. His impatience fed hers. It seemed a tortuously long time before they could leave the restaurant.

"Where to?" Selena asked.

"Go back to Palos Verdes," Alec said hoarsly. "To the cliff." She agreed with him. It seemed fitting.

"See," she said, as she turned off the engine, "they haven't towed it away."

He said: "The back seat." She followed him into the back of the car, responding to the intensity of his voice and

gestures. He was whispering now, helping her take off her clothes, rubbing his hands over the turquoise underwear that he had mistaken for a bikini. He kneaded her, he caressed her, he massaged her skin. He buried his nose in her abdomen and breathed her in. He pulled her hair over one shoulder and burrowed into the golden fall. She wanted to touch the mat of hair on his chest, wanted to embrace his shoulders, but she was afraid to hurt him. He sensed her hesitation and took her hands, holding them against his chest. They tried each other's skin with fingers and tongue. Alec sucked at her nipples until she cried out a complaint, telling him that it was no longer enough. Selena straddled him and Alec felt her lower herself until he was well set within her. His one good hand roved over her body, pinching, smoothing, and then intimately prying at the place they were joined. She shuddered at this further intrusion and hesitated but he flexed himself deeper into her, not giving the protest time to form. He circled her waist with his good arm and held her still as he moved. Her head fell forward until their faces touched. Her hair slid forward until they were hidden within it.

He goaded her to orgasm and did not let her go but caught her again, a moment later, prodding her higher and higher, triggering a series of climaxes in which her body arched and glowed, streaming heat toward him as she grasped and held him.

Then, just as determinedly, with metronomic precision, he moved within her, soaring swiftly upward to meet her on the last peak.

Selena sagged against him, feeling Alec's hand gripping the hair at the back of her neck, the hold painful now. He brought her face forward and bruised her mouth with his lips and teeth and she felt him growing inside her again. She did not think she could bear any more. Her nerves were stripped and jangling; but he tricked her into following him on one last climb, their bodies dripping with sweat, sealed together by the moisture between them.

They must have napped, still locked together, for Selena jerked awake, her head cleared of the passion that had drugged her.

Alec opened his eyes and tried to smile at her, but winced instead.

“Your arm,” Selena said.

“Yes. I’d better go home.”

They dressed, not exactly avoiding each other’s eyes, but not looking at each other too often. Selena helped Alec into the front seat again and then took her place behind the wheel. They were silent all the way back to the marina.

Selena drew up in front of the door to Alec’s tower and left the motor running. “I won’t take you up,” she said.

“Listen,” he answered, as if there was something important he had to tell her. He turned painfully in his seat and grabbed a handful of her hair again, pulling her head toward him. He kissed her deeply on the mouth, not caring if anyone saw them.

“You saved my life,” he said. Selena tried to wave a hand in protest, but Alec ignored her. “Not just in the water,” he said. “Everything afterward. I thank you for that.”

Selena nodded and kissed him gently. She felt completely free: free of Timmons, of the old life, even of this man who had provided her with an excuse and a means to reclaim her freedom.

“You, too,” she said, “for me.”

He looked puzzled, waiting for an explanation.

“From the moment you dove, until now,” Selena said, unwilling to go any further into her most private feelings. She smiled at him sheepishly. “I’ve never had more than one orgasm at a time,” she said.

Alec nodded, pleased.

“And there’s more,” Selena said, “but it isn’t important.” She had been moved to give him the reassurance that it had not been just his sexual triumph that she welcomed.

Alec caressed her cheek. “I’ll call you,” he said.

“No.”

He studied her face in the light shining from the lobby. She seemed calm and sure of what she wanted.

“Really?” Alec asked, trying to make sure that she was not just being generous and unselfish; he expected a practiced martyrdom from women.

“Really. I’m glad about today. But that’s all there is: today.”

Alec heard the truth in her words and, guiltily, felt relieved. He suddenly knew that his passion for her, his delight in her, was the result of having almost died. It had had very little to do with Selena, herself. He had been as driven to taking her as any animal following its biological urge, affirming life in the most natural, unthinking manner possible.

“Whatever you say,” he agreed. “But thank you, again.”

“My pleasure,” Selena said. And suddenly she was laughing. “It really was.”

His arm hurt as if a devil was poking around in the nerves. The morphine and alcohol had worn off and Alec knew that he would not be able to make it through the night like this. Perhaps he could convince Viveca to find a pharmacy to fill the prescription they had given him at the hospital. He had been so driven toward Selena that he had not even remembered that he would need the Demerol later.

“I have to go,” Alec said, sliding out of the car.

“Good-bye,” Selena said. She drove away quickly.

“See you around,” Alec called after her, waving his one good arm in farewell.

XVII

Tournament Day was clear and fiercely sunny, guaranteeing an epidemic of heat prostration and related miseries to the players and public. The first oglers arrived early. They were very young and noisy and they brought with them the accoutrements necessary for star gazing: portable tape recorders with the volume set as high as it would go, frisbies, a supply of drugs and a highly developed critical sense as to which celebrities were worth risking a bludgeoning to approach and which they could turn their backs on in contempt.

These gawkers were seconded by groups of older women, clichés thought no longer to exist. They sported cellulite dappled thighs and heat-swollen feet. Their hair was inevitably far from its original color. Their greatest desire was to catch sight of someone like Burt Reynolds, to be the recipient of a lascivious wink from their hero or, if St. Jude, patron saint of lost causes, was on duty to be swept beyond the cop-guarded gate on his arm, listening to thrillingly obscene, but funny, nothings being whispered into their Coppertone-scented necks. They were the bologna-on-white brigade, beloved of demographers and statisticians for their predictability.

At their feet a young man had spread a tatami mat on the sidewalk and was selling green tennis eye-shades at three dollars apiece. The marina police force was there and a member of that fine corps asked the salesman to move on. This was not a day for commercialism and, besides, he

hadn't bought a license to open up shop. The young man gently argued the policeman into a more favorable view of free enterprise, complimenting the street bull in his wilting blue uniform on being mellow.

A doctor was in attendance and the para-medics had been alerted, just in case.

Selena had seen to it that the reduced grounds-keeping staff had done their job. The fences were down, the tennis courts freshly outlined and swept clean. A notorious crack in Court Number Five had been patched and smoothed.

Canvas cabanas had been set up to seat and protect the participants as they waited their turn in the sunlight. The celebrities had their own bar. It was stocked with the usual alcoholic accompaniments of charity sport, plus gallons of Gatorade and fruit juices for the pure in heart. Players were forced to bring their own cocaine.

Hidden by rented potted trees, four portable toilets waited discretely. Selena worried that the crowd might prove to be larger than expected and the four not be enough; then she forgot about it, trusting to the audience's self-control. And then, everyone who bought tickets might not come. Some people purchased them as a tax deduction and good-guy gesture, and then never showed up.

The pool house had been made to donate its towels. The pro shop had provided the tennis balls and had also elected to remain open during the tournament, in case one of the players decided that he needed a new racquet, or tennis clothes or sweat-bands.

While the players were treated to a buffet catered by the Spire Club kitchen, visitors were expected to purchase their sustenance from vendors who had paid for the right to sell their wares.

Selena greeted the players and assigned them their game times and partners. By eleven o'clock the courts were full as the players warmed up together for the first time, trying to

assess the strengths and weaknesses of the strangers with whom they had been paired. Selena had deliberately chosen to mix celebrities and athletes with the businessmen, assuring that at least one person on each court would be watched lustfully while his or her partners pleasurable, self-consciously, told themselves that they were playing with a star and he's just a regular guy.

Several celebrities asked for a change of partners, finding those assigned to them too strong, or too weak. If they played with a stronger partner they would look foolish. If they played with a weaker one they would have to work too hard not to appear inept. Selena complied with the more urgent requests but she put off two leading men by reminding them that the game was for charity and it did not matter if they won or lost. They accepted her decision with public grace and good will even though they both knew that what mattered was how one *looked* and both complained to their managers that evening.

Chrome silver cups had been donated by a trophy company. They were to be awarded to the top doubles and mixed doubles winners. It had been decided that each foursome would play two sets of tennis: there were too many entrants to allow a longer display than that and the crowd, who had come to be entertained, wanted the most for their money.

Most of the celebrities and athletes had adopted a simple, openhearted attitude for the afternoon. There was much banter and show of good sportsmanship among them as they compared rackets and recounted past games and complained about their serves or backhands, informing each other of their weaknesses on the court in a display of humility. The occasion demanded it.

Timmons moved among them, playing host, greeting all the players with "Hiya," or "Howzit goin'?", shaking hands, clapping backs and making himself known to those who had never met him. The bleachers were beginning to fill

now. The first arrivals had been a gaggle of young girls carrying rolled up posters. They spotted Timmons and squealed, warming up for the afternoon's work. Vincent Say gave them last minute instructions and then escorted his personal young lady to the better seats at mid-court.

At twelve-thirty a platoon of teen-agers, dressed in immaculate white, descended on the tennis courts and invited the athletes to clear the area for the opening ceremonies.

Outside, the traffic had frozen in place. Cars were backed up to the freeway exit and householders on the fringes of the marina began turning their minuscule lawns into parking lots, allowing the Mercedes, the artistically ruined old convertibles, and the Japanese or Swedish station wagons to smash their *dichondra* into soup greens.

A steady stream of sports lovers and gawkers trudged through the gates and toward the bleachers. They passed another group of young girls holding "Timmons Clarke In The Dark" signs, or wearing Timmons Clarke tee-shirts. Vincent Say had done his homework. Most of the audience entering the bleacher area were expensively dressed. This was an event which demanded much attention to one's costume. A television crew stumbled about, backing into people as they jockeyed for position.

"Ladies and Geltlemen," a voice boomed over the loudspeaker system (donated and installed by Marina Quad Sound), "Your Master of Ceremonies for the day: Sonny DeLane!"

The kitchen crew, outfitted in lime green mariachi drag, squalled a lively introduction as Sonny DeLane took the hand mike and tugged its long cord into the approximate center of Court Number One. He looked about for the TV crew and, satisfied that one camera was on him, began.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the First Annual Joshua Quick Heart Research Foundation Celebrity Tennis Tournament!"

Applause answered his greeting and the mariachi band added sixteen bars of whining confusion to the noise.

"In just a few minutes we will have the pleasure of watching some of your favorite people play tennis in a tribute to that great star, Joshua Quick!"

Whistles and applause broke out again as Sonny DeLane peered at the people standing at the edge of the court, trying to find Joshua. It had been planned that Joshua would be introduced to the paying audience but he was not there. Sonny hesitated only a moment, glanced down at the notes that Selena had given him earlier, and proceeded to sell the observers on their own generosity and the excitement that awaited them.

Four courts were to be used for this first part of the afternoon and Sonny introduced each player who then trotted out to take his place. The difference in the levels of applause was embarrassing. Celebrities were greeted with enthusiastic clapping, while the businessmen received only polite splatters as they jogged out to join their betters. The squeals and shrieks for Timmons were effective. It sounded as if he had a fan club.

The audience was seated on three sides of the playing area. A hawker was doing good business renting binoculars. The officials were settled into position. The white-clad teen-agers were now crouched in sprint position, ready to chase balls.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Sonny DeLane boomed, his voice echoing back and forth across the courts, "play ball!" It was displaced, but effective. Arms rose, yellow spheres were tossed upward and four thwacks were heard as the games started.

Sonny DeLane left the court, pulling the microphone cord out of the way of the game that had begun on Court Number One. He handed the mike to a young man sitting at the control console. There was a squeal of feedback and then the sound died as the young man flipped a switch.

"See you later," Sonny DeLane said to him in a conspiratorial tone, implying that they were professionals together in this business. The young man nodded and looked off in another direction, displaying his lack of awe. Sonny DeLane felt sick, as if he had suddenly lost a job. Then two young women asked him for his autograph. He signed jovially, asking for their names with automatic heartiness. Feeling better, he went to find Selena.

She was talking on the telephone. "Where's Joshua?" Sonny DeLane asked. Selena pointed to the telephone and continued her conversation. Then she hung up, her face tight with worry and said: "That was Mallorey. She doesn't think he can make it."

"But it's his tournament!" Sonny exclaimed. "He should be here."

David Nash approached, his gait hasty and nervous. "Where's Joshua?" he demanded.

"They're still on *Moorea Cloud*," Selena said. "He's not coming."

David winced. He sensed the afternoon turning into a disaster. He had promised Denny Brock that Joshua would be here. The head of King's Rest had taken it for granted that David could deliver what he promised. It did not matter that there were other public figures present, ready to entertain the audience. It did not matter that the audience, itself, contained people of merit. Joshua's presence was necessary to make the entire project a success.

"I'll go get him," David said.

"If he's sick. . ." Selena said, but David ignored her. He edged around the crowd, trying to find Denny Brock, spotting him, finally, sitting in one of the cabanas, sipping a drink and eyeing the waiting athletes. He looked like a rancher estimating the value of his herd.

"Can I borrow your car?" David asked Brock.

"What for?"

"To pick up Joshua Quick," David replied. "The right sort of transportation. . . ."

"Why isn't he here?" Brock demanded, suspicious that he was being cheated of his due.

"He's not feeling well, or something," David said. "I told you he was sick. I want to see if I can convince him to come over, if only for five minutes."

"You remind him that we did all this for him," Brock said angrily. "You get him here." Brock had no patience with artistic temperament.

"I was planning to," David said soothingly. "But I think it might be a good idea to send your car for him."

"Sylv will drive you," Brock said. Sylv nodded and rose from the chair in which he had been seated. It was then that David noticed how the two men were dressed. They were both wearing navy linen blazers and white trousers. Denny Brock sported a very large ascot. You could not see the shirt beneath it. Sylv had contented himself with an open-necked sportshirt. Brock's mocassins were white patent leather: Sylv's were black, with tassles.

David inspected them. They were caricatures of elegance; sharp rather than chic. "Classy," Brock said, demanding an affirmative.

"Very nice," David agreed, biting his lips to keep from laughing. Both men wore identical, florentine-finish gold wristwatches. Brock's had a face of lapis lazuli, Sylv's was rose coral. Brock was looking at his watch in irritation.

"Let's go," Sylv said. They headed for the reserved parking space that belonged to Denny Brock. No matter how bad the traffic in the marina, Brock always had a parking slot. The one next to the tennis courts had his name painted on it in large white letters and the marina police automatically towed away anyone who dared usurp the spot.

"Hot today," Sylv said. He was making small talk, something he never did. David supposed it was the casualness of the occasion that prompted the comment.

"Very. Going to get hotter," David answered.

They reached Brock's car, a white Cadillac limousine that Selena had christened "Moby Dick" the first time she had seen it. The doors were opened and they waited for the interior to cool off, running the air conditioner to speed the process along.

"Okay," Sylv said, pulling his door closed. They backed into traffic with a marina security guard holding up the on-coming cars.

"He's at . . ." David said but Sylv interrupted with a hurt: "You think I don't know?"

The great white car shimmied its rear end at every turn. Then they were at Portofino and Sylv was guiding the car through the entry gates and up to the edge of the quay.

"You get him," Sylv said, never doubting that Joshua would come at Denny Brock's bidding. "I'll turn the car around."

David walked to *Moorea Cloud* and climbed on board. He immediately saw Malloreys seated under a canopy. Next to her was a wizened old man, probably one of Consuelo's uncles, David thought. Then the man turned and David realized it was Joshua and he stopped, one foot extended to take the next step.

"Come aboard," Malloreys called, thinking that David was reluctant to walk forward without an invitation. Joshua turned to look at the newcomer and David's eyes slid away involuntarily. It was not possible that the person he was looking at was Joshua. The man had aged twenty years in the last two months. David hesitated. He understood now why Joshua had not wanted to come. Yet David was forced to demand his presence at the tournament. David was cynical enough to know that Denny Brock wanted Joshua there not

only because of the tournament, but because it would help Denny Brock lease apartments; it would help Denny Brock sell people on the Spires.

"I've come to escort you to your tournament," David said. He hoped he sounded carefree and sincere. He hoped he sounded firm.

"No," Joshua said.

"There's a couple thousand people who've come to see you," David said cajolingly. "They're going to be very disappointed if you don't show up. And all the people who have come to play. *In your honor*, Joshua."

Joshua stared straight ahead.

"He can't," Malloreys said. Her voice was soft but David could hear the warning in it. He had to ignore her. His feelings for her had nothing to do with business.

"Very unprofessional, Joshua," David said. His voice was cold. "We've set up this whole performance for you and you won't even play your part."

Joshua sniffed. He had never been unprofessional. It was the only word David could have used to entice him.

"A couple thousand people?" he asked.

"Give or take," David confirmed. "In the stands, and grounds, standing around waiting to see you. People have come from all over."

"Yes," Joshua sighed, "well, I suppose I'll have to go. For five minutes," he breathed sadly, "no more."

"Just long enough for Sonny DeLane to introduce you to the crowd and you take a bow, say a couple of words and then you're through."

"Impossible," Joshua said, sinking back into his chair.

"Why?"

There was a short pause and then Joshua spoke in an even, matter-of-fact voice. "Because I have trouble walking: I can barely stand. I'm doped to the gills and I have a hard time moving about. That's why."

"Oh," David said, lost. Denny Brock would be furious.

"Do you have another suggestion?" Mallorey asked acidly.

"Well, if we could get Joshua to the car, we could drive him to the edge of the tennis courts. Then it's only a matter of thirty feet or so to the cabanas. Joshua can meet Denny Brock, the man who arranged this whole thing. . . ."

Joshua cocked an eye at David. This, then, was the main reason for transporting him away from the comfort of *Moorea Cloud*.

". . . and a few people will come up to greet you and then we'll take you home."

"Yes, all right," Joshua said. "Let's get started." He gestured to Mallorey. "I'm dressed adequately for this farce. Call Manny. Tell him to put on his uniform. The jacket will be enough."

"How about Consuelo?" David suggested. "Don't you want Mrs. Quick with you today?"

Joshua ignored him so David did not insist. Mallorey disappeared into the cabin and returned a few moments later with Manny, who was struggling to put on a pale blue shirt. It had obviously spent some time packed away for it was wrinkled and limp.

"Why you want me to wear this thing?" Manny grumbled, standing over his employer.

"This is a ceremonial occasion," Joshua said. "We want to dress properly."

"She tells me you're going there," Manny said, indicating a landward direction with a butt of his head.

"Yes."

"Damn fool."

"Yes, but we're going. Help me up."

David stepped forward to help lift Joshua from his chair but Manny shouldered him aside. His arms went around the old man and he straightened, holding Joshua as tenderly as a bridegroom carrying a bride over the threshhold.

"Damn fool," Manny repeated.

"This way," David said briskly and led them to the limousine. Sylv watched them approach the car. His usual taciturn expression relaxed. Manny placed Joshua on the overstuffed, velvet covered rear seat. Then he and Mallorey went around to the other side of the car and slid in beside Joshua. Manny insisted on sitting next to him.

David and Sylv took their seats in front and the car began to move. "Hold it," Joshua said. Sylv stopped the car.

"Look at her, will you?" Joshua said, peering out toward *Moorea Cloud* at the far end of the quay. "I haven't had a clear look at her in so long, I'd almost forgotten how beautiful she is."

"Beautiful, beautiful," David agreed impatiently.

"That's a terrific boat, Mr. Quick," Sylv said. "No wonder you'd rather stay on her than come into town. I want you to know that we appreciate your taking time to participate in the tournament. It's very gracious of you."

David looked at Sylv in astonishment. He had never heard the man speak so many words. He saw the expression on Sylv's face. It was sad and respectful.

"Just sit back," Sylv said. "Enjoy the ride. It's not far but we want you to be comfortable." The warmth was obvious, even though the accent was vulgar.

David continued staring at Sylv who, for a moment, looked directly at him before turning his attention back to driving.

"Class is class," Sylv said. "You gotta respect it when you see it."

David sat back, bemused at this tribute to Joshua. He never would have thought to see Sylv depart from his rigid stance of non-participation. Compared to the way he usually acted, the man was being florid.

The car pulled up to the marina gate, swung around the other automobiles that were now abandoned by their impatient owners, and headed toward the tennis courts.

“What’s that?” David asked.

“I dunno, but I don’t like it,” Sylv answered.

In front of them a clot of people stood, arms locked together to form a human chain while, behind them, others held up posters and signs. At the sight of the limousine, they began to shout.

“What’re they saying?” Mallorey asked.

“The signs. It’s about King’s Rest. Something. Oh, God, it’s a protest. It’s those people from Newport Mews,” David said.

The protesters were advancing on the car now. Sylv flicked the switch that locked all four doors. “Just stay calm,” he said and began to inch forward, heading toward the protesters like a tank trying to thread its way through a mine field.

Mallorey leaned forward, trying to see out of the front window.

“Did you know about this?” Sylv asked David.

“I’d heard that they were having meetings but I didn’t know it had become this serious.”

“They sure as hell picked the right time, didn’t they?” Sylv said. “Just what we needed.” His lips were pressed together and his face blank with anger. “Shit!” he exploded. “Denny’s not going to like this.”

David knew that Brock was not worrying about Joshua; he was worrying about the audience. There were many people here today, some who had come to the marina for the first time. It would make a very bad impression on them. David read one of the signs, looked carefully at the protesters and realized exactly how bad an impression it would make. And there was a television crew on hand. David could see one of the cameramen filming the demonstration, his partner carrying the power pack, crouching behind him. Someone with a microphone, wearing studio make-up under the glaring sun, was interviewing a protestor. David recognized Peter. The

young man was talking into the microphone at a steady clip: he obviously had had experience being interviewed before.

The demonstrators were noisier now, chanting and shouting as they crowded around the car.

“What is it?” Joshua asked querulously.

“It’s nothing,” Mallorey said. “Don’t worry.”

“What do they want?” Sylv asked.

“I told Denny about it a long time ago,” David said. “Newport Mews is falling apart and these people want him to repair it. He refused. I warned him they’d make trouble.”

“Too bad you didn’t know about this beforehand,” Sylv said quietly.

“How could I know?” David asked, angry at the presumption that he had failed somehow by not forecasting this protest.

“You should have known,” Sylv said. There was no arguing with him: he truly believed it.

“Nobody knew. Mallorey,” David turned around in the seat and looked at her. “You live in Newport Mews. Did you know?”

“I haven’t been to my apartment in about three weeks,” Mallorey said, “but I knew the committee was planning a protest. I didn’t know exactly when.” She was worried about Joshua, not about the crowd.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” David accused.

“I was told that they had tried to talk to you many, many times. I just took it for granted that you knew what was going on. They said that they’d given you every chance to respond to their complaints.”

David turned to peer out of the window. A few of the demonstrators had climbed on to the limousine’s fenders. Sylv was still inching the car forward.

There was a swirling motion at the edge of the crowd and three marina security men appeared, pulling at the demonstrators, trying to dislodge them from the automobile.

"Come on!" David said, impatient for the police to do what they were paid to do. "Get them off here!" He made calling gestures with his arms, as if he could sweep the people away from inside the car.

Until the security men had arrived the protest had been loud and raucous but not threatening. Now, one of the policemen pulled a sign out of a girl's hand and flipped it away, keeping hold of her shirt as he did. The girl pushed against his chest. The policeman began to shake her roughly. The girl waved her arms wildly, trying to escape from his grasp. One of her waving hands caught him on the nose. He dumped her on the ground and reached for his cuffs. The crowd began to yell.

The shouts and screams filtered through the thickness of glass to the interior of the car. Faces appeared at the windows, grimacing. Bodies crawled over the car, large, bright-colored worms slithering across the hood and trunk. Hands began beating on the side of the limousine.

"These fans are out of control," Joshua snapped. "Where's the police?"

"It's nothing," David said. "Don't worry."

More police had arrived and were pulling at the protestors sitting on the car. The television crew was standing directly outside the trunk of the car, filming everything that happened.

"Not good," David said. "You're going to have to tell Denny to talk to the security men. They're handling it all wrong."

A cop threw a demonstrator against the side of the car. The boy's body banged into the window directly next to Joshua.

"My God!" Joshua exclaimed, startled. He shrank away from the window, leaning toward Manny.

"Don't worry," David said anxiously, "we'll be past this bunch in a minute." He suddenly saw Dina. She swirled in

and out of the crowd, slow enough to notice, too fast to fasten on.

"They got a pretty good turn-out," Sylv said. He was counting, calculating. "They got plenty of bodies to come out for this."

"I warned Denny," David repeated.

"You should have warned him harder," Sylv said.

"How?" David asked, exasperated. "He refuses to listen when it's something he doesn't want to hear."

"Business is business," Sylv said. "You been working for him long enough to know that if you get the right business angle you can make him listen to anything."

"I tried," David said, irritated that Sylv should dare give him advice and, worse, be chiding him. Sylv was only a go-fer: how dare he correct David?

The police had managed to clear a path and Sylv pushed the limousine through. He wheeled the great car around the corner and into Denny Brock's parking space.

"Made it," Sylv said. "I gotta go help the cops. Why don't you hustle Mr. Quick over to the tennis court?"

"He's dead," Manny said. They all looked at Joshua. Manny was holding him with one arm, supporting the dead man's head on his chest.

"Miss Swann," Manny said calmly, "I think you better get out of the car. We can handle this."

"I want. . ." Mallorey began, and stopped. She wanted to be with Joshua, but she did not want to be with that dead body that was no longer Joshua. She could not believe it. He had been there just two minutes ago and now he was dead. He hadn't made a noise, or clutched his heart or anything. She felt no grief for she did not believe it.

"Where are you taking him?" Mallorey asked.

"Back to *Moorea*," Manny said. Nobody questioned his decision. "I know just what to do," Manny reassured her.

"You can come back later, for dinner. This has all been planned for, Miss Swann, don't you worry. I have a letter to give you and there'll be things he wants you to do."

"Yes, okay," Mallorey said, opening the door and sliding out of the car. "I'll be along in about an hour."

"Make it two hours," Manny said.

"Yes, whatever you say."

"I'll stay with Miss Swann," David said, opening his door and nimbly stepping out into the clean, hot air. "She'll need me."

Sylv looked at him and then turned the ignition key to start the engine. "Shut the door," Sylv said rudely, "you're letting in all the hot air."

David walked around to take Mallorey's arm. They watched the car back out into traffic again. In the rear seat Manny had pushed Joshua's body back and slid away from him, keeping one hand on Joshua's shoulder to keep him from falling over.

"My God," Mallorey said, "they're going to have to drive through that crowd of people."

"Joshua won't know," David said soothingly.

Mallorey heard the unctuous tone and turned away from him.

"Let's go back to the tournament," David said, trying to put his arm around her shoulder. "I'll have to make an announcement."

Mallorey moved out of his reach. "Don't say anything," she pleaded.

"But they have to be told," David protested.

"You fool," Mallorey said, and burst into tears. She walked away from him. He saw that she did not want him to follow her and was hurt, and then frustrated, that she would not allow him to take advantage of the situation. She was a difficult woman to deal with and, for that reason also, worth it. This would have been the perfect moment for him to

establish a firm claim on her. He could have held her while she cried. He could have taken care of things for her, become indispensable so that later, when her grief abated, she would have taken it for granted that he was part of her life. And he would have been in control, finally. In dealing with other people David knew that there was nothing like habit to blind them to a changing reality or new circumstances.

He watched Mallorey disappear into the pool house. "Probably going to cry in the bathroom," he thought. "Put some water on her face." He could imagine her standing in that pink-tiled restroom, pressing wet paper towels against her eyes to cool them. He speculated for a moment on Mallorey's capacity for tears. It could be a problem if she turned out to be a weeper. His musings came to an end. At this moment there were other things to do.

David walked hurriedly back to the tennis courts. Sonny DeLane was announcing another change of tennis players. There was more mariachi music and applause. It sounded futile now, David thought. He would tell Denny Brock and then he would tell Sonny DeLane to announce Joshua's death. It could be the First Annual Joshua Quick Memorial Tennis Tournament, David thought. He wondered, briefly, where the foundation money would eventually go. He had tried to discuss it with Denny several times but had always been put off. Denny wanted to wait and see how much they actually took in before making that decision. David supposed it would be U.C.L.A. or U.S.C. Denny Brock had a thing about education and universities.

"Too bad," Denny Brock said, when David told him about Joshua's death. And: "Are you nuts?" when David wanted to have Sonny DeLane make the announcement.

"But he's dead," David replied.

"Later," Denny said, "after the last game is finished. Then you tell them. Hell, Dave, these people came here for a good time. They want to see all the stars, not hear that

somebody died. Use your head."

"Oh," David said. He did not believe that was the reason Mallorey had meant when she tried to stop him from announcing Joshua's death. "You're right," David said to Denny.

"Sure. Just sit back and enjoy the afternoon," Denny said. "Unless you want to be with the deceased?" Denny had lowered his voice piously. He was trying to be polite and generous in his own way.

"No, thanks," David said. "He was nothing to me."

Mallorey made her way through the pool house and out the other side. She was numb and trembling and slightly crazed. David's demeanor had undone her. She wondered how she had ever found him perfect, even for one instant's misunderstanding of him. He displayed public attitudes of emotions he could not feel, just as Timmons displayed his body and tried to behave as if his uninformed fantasies were going to come true. They were both people waiting for something to happen: David was waiting to discover his real life; Timmons was waiting for real life to discover him. They were two people who did not exist except as characters in a play they reinvented each day of their existence. They were packages empty of content.

"They don't exist," Mallorey thought and the landscape shifted before her eyes. The buildings behind her seemed far away, yet they loomed heavily, dangerously over her. The transplants of grass seemed to her to be resting lightly on the ground, waiting to be rolled up like temporary runners placed for a ceremony. She sensed that the roots under the drying vegetation were retracted, held up to the underside of the greenery to keep them from the wounding, sterile soil of the marina.

There was noise and movement ahead and Mallorey drifted toward it. There were more cameras and police cars

and shifting clumps of people and signs thrust in the air and shouts. There were still photographers at the edge of the crowd. Some of them were holding their cameras straight up in the air, pointing the lenses at the approximate areas of the action, shooting blind over the heads of the demonstrators.

Mallorey felt someone grab her and looked down at the hand holding her arm and then up into Peter's face.

"You decided to come after all!" Peter exclaimed. "I knew your social conscience wouldn't let you stay away. Come on, I want to put you in front of the cameras, get you interviewed. You know what to say, don't you?"

She saw him putting on a serious attitude, as if he were drawing on a uniform before going into battle. "'You're another one,'" Mallorey thought, trying to remove her arm from his grasp. "You think everything is temporary."

"Come on," Peter repeated.

"What? No, please. . . ." Mallorey said and he was dragging her forward, through the fringes of the crowd and toward the television crew, yelling, "Hey, wait a minute! You want a great interview?"

"Step it down," someone in the crew said to the cameraman. "She's got hardly any makeup on."

"Shit, man, I know my business," the camera operator retorted.

"Mallorey Swann," Peter said enthusiastically, "the movie star! She's with us!"

"Okay," the interviewer said to Mallorey. "You have a statement you want to read or you want to do questions and answers? Tell me what you want to say, honey."

"What? No, I don't want to say anything," Mallorey said, trying to break out of Peter's grasp.

"Step out of the frame, would you, guy?" the interviewer ordered. Reluctantly, Peter let go of Mallorey and backed away a step.

"Okay, a short count-down, right, Mallorey?" He turned

to the cameraman. "Shoot about thirty seconds, unless she's got something hot," he instructed.

"Yeah, okay, let's get going, huh?" the cameraman retorted, screwing his face around the eyepiece and bracing himself. "This mother's not as light as it looks."

"Four, three, two, one, we're shooting," the assistant chanted. There was a pause and then the interviewer changed, deepened and sombered his voice as he declaimed into the camera. "Here is that bright, young star, Mallorey Swann." He turned toward her, pushing the microphone in the general direction of her chest. "Are you part of the protest, Mallorey? What do you have to do with Newport Mews and tell us about what we've seen here today."

"I live at Newport Mews," Mallorey said faintly.

The sound man cursed to himself and turned up the volume. He'd had the same problems with Marilyn Monroe, who couldn't ever seem to get the words out over a whisper. And this kid didn't have the tits.

"Are the conditions as bad as the demonstrators claim?" the interviewer asked.

"Oh, this is awful," Mallorey sobbed, realizing that the camera was on her. She could not understand how she had come to be here.

"How is it awful, Mallorey?"

She looked desperately to her right. "Talk to this man," Mallorey pleaded. "He's the organizer of the demonstration. I can't talk now."

"Why are you afraid to talk?" the interviewer said. "Do you think your career will be hurt by taking part in the protest?" He was casting about, trying to find an angle, but she wasn't giving him a hook he could latch on to.

"Hurt my career," Mallorey repeated, looking at the interviewer with a blank expression. The cameraman came in on a tight close-up. Mallorey was puzzled. She could not

understand what the man was saying to her. It registered on tape as sadness and determination.

"You seem upset, Mallorey," the interviewer said. "Have you been physically mistreated during this protest?" He was sweating, trying to get some response from the dumb bitch.

"Joshua's dead," Mallorey blurted.

The interviewer's reflexes were good. He knew, somehow, that he was getting a beat on a story.

"You mean Joshua Quick?" he asked, identifying the man for his audience. "Joshua Quick is dead?"

"Yes, he just died," Mallorey said. "Just a little while ago." She thought the man with the microphone was looking at her sympathetically. It loosened her emotions and her tongue. "It was the demonstration," Mallorey said and her voice trailed away. That was not what she had meant to say, but how could she explain exactly what had happened when she did not yet believe it herself.

"Joshua Quick died taking part in this demonstration?" the interviewer asked. He was excited, but he kept his voice calm and low. "I thought that a tournament in his honor was being held right at this very moment, sponsored by the owners of Newport Mews. Isn't that true?"

Mallorey nodded. The man was babbling nonsense but she could not see a way to stop him, to explain, to correct the impression he was giving.

"So Joshua Quick turned his back on the very people who had set out to honor him and chose to cast his lot with the protestors. Is that what you're saying?"

Mallorey looked directly at the interviewer and burst into tears. She knew that disaster was being piled on disaster as she stood there, unable to talk coherently, with the endless zipping sound of the camera helping to enclose her in a structure of lies.

The interviewer turned quickly toward the camera and, pushing his voice into a funereal throb, summed up the situation he had invented.

"This is extraordinary. Joshua Quick, that life-long rebel, died as he had lived, in rebellion. Mallorey Swann, his. . ." the interviewer hesitated so that no one would miss the innuendo. . ."great and good friend, has put aside her grief in order to carry out Joshua Quick's wishes. Instead of mourning in private. . ." the interviewer shifted his stance to emphasize his next words . . ."as she has every right to do, she chose to take Joshua Quick's place in the protest. We'll never see his like again. And it is not often that we see anything like the courage and strength of Mallorey Swann."

The interviewer fell silent after his brief editorial. The cameraman ran two feet of blank tape through the camera. The hissing noise stopped.

"You need anything for protection?" the interviewer asked.

"No, I've got enough," the cameraman said.

Mallorey still stood weeping. The interviewer looked past her, impatient and irritated now that they were no longer taping.

"You have something else?" he asked Peter.

"No, I guess that'll do it," Peter replied. "Will it be ready for the six o'clock news?"

"Yeah. If it had been just the protest you might not have made it. But the Joshua Quick angle guarantees you at least forty-five seconds."

"Good enough," Peter said. "But I guess you'll run the obit first, right?"

"Yeah, we'll lead in with the rebel stuff, probably. Don't worry, you'll get some coverage, all right."

They were two professionals, discussing their trade. The noise of the demonstration had begun to die down. The police

were pushing several people, their hands cuffed behind their backs, toward the patrol cars.

"You want to get some of that?" the cameraman asked the interviewer.

"Might as well, but God knows we have enough of that kind of stuff already."

Peter turned away, leaving Mallorey alone on the edge of the disintegrating demonstration. He joined the camera crew heading for the patrol cars. The police noticed the little group descending on them and sheathed their nightsticks. They began rushing their disheveled charges into the patrol cars while the sirens tuned up in rich falsetto shrieks.

Dina found Peter standing and watching the departure of the police. "Did you get their names?" she asked. "Where are they being taken?"

Peter shrugged. "We'll telephone around later and find them."

"We have to get down there and bail them out," Dina said.

"We've made no provision for a bail fund," Peter reminded her.

"But. . ." Dina began.

"No, no, everyone takes responsibility for his own actions," Peter said. "They'll have to arrange their own bail. Hell, most of them will be booked and released. But we should find out where they'll be so we can get some bodies over there with signs. Set up another demonstration. Maybe we can get some more mileage out of this."

Dina stared at him. "You shit," she said, and walked away from him. She saw a woman staggering, walking on the narrow sidewalk as if she was negotiating a tightrope. Dina hurried to catch up with her, worried that the woman had been hurt.

She recognized Mallorey the moment she reached her, a

Malloreys whose face was drawn and yellow and whose body was tightened into a thin, tense arrow of self-protection.

“Malloreys?” Dina said, afraid to touch her. “Are you hurt?”

“Joshua’s dead,” Malloreys said, “and I don’t know what I told that man. Your friend was there and he didn’t make them stop the camera. He just let it go on and on and the man was saying things, I don’t know, he was just saying things that were crazy.”

Dina put an arm around Malloreys shoulders.

“No,” Malloreys said, “I don’t want that. Please.”

Dina’s arm fell. “Do you want to go home?” she asked.

“Yes,” Malloreys said. “But I don’t know where it is.” They walked in silence for a few moments. “Your friend,” Malloreys said. “What was he doing to me?”

“The same thing he did to me,” Dina said, trying to breathe deeply and finding it difficult to do so. There was a heavy lump of loss blocking her lungs. “He’s no friend.”

“I have to leave here,” Malloreys said. “I can’t live in this place anymore.”

“That makes two of us,” Dina replied.

“I have to figure out where to go,” Malloreys said. It did not matter that she was talking to a stranger. She began to cry again.

“Just take it a little bit at a time,” Dina said.

“Where did I leave my car?” Malloreys asked. “I have to go to *Moorea Cloud*. Joshua’s waiting for me and I don’t have my car.”

Dina stared at the confused, grieving woman. She no longer could recognize the beautiful, competent creature she had first seen in the hallway at *Newport Mews*.

“Why don’t we go to your apartment,” Dina suggested. “You can take a shower and change before you go anywhere.”

"You're very sensible," Mallorey agreed between sobs.
"Very sensible."

"That's me," Dina said acidly. "I'm sensible in everything I do. I think I'm going to just take off for a bit." She smiled grimly. "Maybe I'll just be crazy for a while. Sensible doesn't seem to work for me."

"Nothing works here," Mallorey said. Dina nodded.
"You may very well be right."

XVIII

There was not a set of mourning clothes to be seen. Viveca wore her most formal yachting attire, a navy and white cotton pants suit that she had not tried on in years. She had had to move the buttons at the waist before she could fasten it.

Alec insisted on wearing a short-sleeved shirt. His cast was itching terribly and he was damned if he was going to add to his discomfort any further.

Consuelo's mother had tried to force her into black, including a veil for her hair, but her faithless daughter had refused.

"Mamy," Consuelo had said, "I'm not going to wear that crap."

"Aiie," her mother had shrieked. "*Nunca has sido una buena esposa!*"

"Mamy," Consuelo repeated, but her mother was launched. "*Nunca en tu vida isiste nada bien!*" "Maa-my," Consuelo had said warningly. "*Siempre has sido una puta!*" her mother had added, indignantly. And then she had declared, majestically, drawing up her plump body into a picture of maternal wrath: "*Desde este momento no sigues siendo mi hija!*"

"Shit!" Consuelo had said, tearing the mourning draperies from her mother's hands and throwing them overboard. "Why don't you just have a drink, Mamy, and relax? We'll be putting out to sea real soon now. Papi, get Mamy a drink."

Consuelo's family stood at the prow of *Moorea Cloud*, a

clump of black against the pale blue sky. Consuelo remained dressed in a pair of white satin wide-legged dance shorts and a halter top. She was looking fleshy and damp, her bare feet skittering nervously as she paced back and forth, waiting for the funeral to get started.

Malloreys and Manny had gone to the crematorium together. When they came back Manny was carrying a shopping bag in his arms. Inside the bag was a cardboard box full of Joshua's ashes. Sonny tried to make a joke about Joshua being sent away in a plain brown wrapper, but it did not go over well.

Moorea Cloud put out to sea, its deck full of people standing uneasily, braced against the roll and pitch, all of them wearing shoes. Joshua would have been aghast at the way his carefully preserved deck was being marked up by all that leather, but everyone felt the occasion demanded the respect of shod feet.

Malloreys had been wounded at the sight of *Moorea Cloud* filled with people dressed in white, holding glasses in their hands. She had thought that it looked like an advertisement for vodka. It was not the way she had envisioned bidding Joshua farewell.

She noticed a pale man, dressed in grey, sitting in a corner under the awning. Nobody seemed to know who he was. Consuelo came up to her and said, "You see that creep? That's the lawyer."

Consuelo had screamed and wept for a short time yesterday but was completely recovered now. Even her resentment of Malloreys had evaporated. She was nervy and skittish and completely sober.

Other guests had been invited. A few had shown up: acquaintances of Joshua's from the old days, young powers in the film business who were here to give a bow in the direction of tradition, assuring their position in the business' hierarchy by taking part in this funeral.

Timmons stood and listened as a man who called himself a producer flattered him. "You're looking real good, kid," the man said, pleased that he knew how to speak sports talk. "I saw you at the tournament: you play a mean game of tennis."

Timmons nodded graciously. He was afraid to utter a word that might scare off this rare and hypersensitive animal.

"You ever thought of doing some acting?" the producer inquired. He was staking a claim, thinking: "It might work out, it might not, but you plant a lot of seeds and maybe one, two come up."

"I've been working with Vincent Say," Timmons said with dignity.

"Well, the girls seem to love ya," the producer continued. Acting lessons were one thing, audience response another.

"Maybe we ought to talk," the producer said. "You have an agent?" Then, hastily, "Not that we need to get into that at this point. It's just maybe we should see what we could come up with."

Timmons's hands were gripped tightly around his glass. He was afraid to breathe, afraid to cough or make a sound. "I have someone who sort of represents me. Not an agent," he said quickly, "just an attorney to advise me."

"Oh?" the producer said carefully.

"On an informal basis," Timmons said desperately. He looked around for David, caught his eye and beckoned to him.

David saw the gesture, saw the fright in Timmons's face. He studied the man to whom Timmons was speaking, not recognizing him, but recognizing the type. Timmons was in trouble and he needed help. Let the idiot sweat. Timmons beckoned again. There was panic in his face. David was slow enough to let Timmons know he was doing him a favor.

"How are you, Timmons?" he asked. "Terrible thing, isn't it?"

They all solemnly agreed that it was a terrible thing. Then,

the proprieties having been observed, they turned to important matters. Timmons introduced the two men. David vaguely recognized the name.

"You're representing Tim?" the producer asked.

David smiled noncommittally.

"On an informal basis," Timmons said, "as I told you."

"We ought to get together, then," the producer said heartily, one businessman to another. "When would be a good time for you, Counselor?"

"To talk about what?" David asked.

"I might have a very nice little part for Tim," the producer said carefully. He took David's restraint for the opening move in a bargaining session.

"I suppose I could find some time next week," David said, amused. "I'll have my girl call your girl and set up an appointment."

They did not exchange telephone numbers. David's secretary would have to track down the man's number and address on her own; but that was part of the game.

"Looking forward to it," the man said and nodded an apologetic farewell, turning away from them to see what other business he could do.

"Will you represent me?" Timmons asked in a whisper when the man was out of earshot. "I couldn't think of anyone else when he asked if I had an agent."

"I'm not an agent," David reminded him severely.

"No, you're a lawyer. That's what I need: a lawyer."

"Twenty percent," David said.

"Ten," Timmons countered.

"Twenty," David insisted.

"Okay."

"Plus expenses."

"Oh, hey," Timmons protested.

"Plus expenses."

"Okay." Timmons felt cheated already, even before the first words were printed on a contract.

Moorea Cloud was in open water now. David looked back toward shore, surprised at how far they had come. He thought that now was a good time to talk to Mallorey, to take a firm step toward insinuating himself into her life.

"I'll see you next week," David told Timmons, "after I set up an appointment." He left the young man standing alone, still squeezing his glass in fright and ecstasy.

Mallorey and Selena sat together in the midships cabin. Selena seemed to have changed since the tournament. She had been warmly complimented by many people for her handling of the organization, for the way she had solved the last minute problems, for the way she had taken care of the complaints and accidents, the tantrums and conceits of the participants. She had been invited to a number of gatherings, not as Timmons' wife, but on her own. She had even been offered a job. She suddenly saw her future as an endless path of possibilities. Hope had calmed her, given her a more objective vision of the people around her. She was leaving Timmons: her bags were packed.

Mallorey sat with one hand on the box holding Joshua's ashes. Where, at first, she had been numb and then grief-stricken, now she was simply filled with yearning. She could not let go of Joshua. She searched in other people's eyes for an answering memory of him, for a like despair. She wanted people to talk about him, to tell her stories she had not known. She wanted as much information, as many impressions as she could collect to help fill out her picture of the man. She wanted his entire history, wanted all of him with a kind of despondent greed.

"You need anything?" David asked.

"No, thank you. Only to have him still alive."

"You loved him very much," David said.

"Yes, I didn't realize how much. I miss him, as cantankerous and terrible as he was these last few weeks."

"What are you going to do?" David asked.

"I don't know, I haven't thought about it." Mallorey

knew she would have to make plans. Her life was at a standstill. Joshua's illness had given her an excuse not to confront the problems, not to take her life in hand.

"If you need anything: help, advice, or just someone to be with," David offered.

"Yes. Thank you." She wanted him to go away. He was looming over her, offering sympathy when he meant hunger, showing warmth when he meant possessiveness.

Selena was watching them. Mallorey's face was puffy with yesterday's tears, her eyes sore from crying. "Why don't you bring us a drink?" Selena suggested to David.

"Sure," he said heartily. "What do you want?"

"How about a brandy?" Selena said to Mallorey. "Bring her a cognac, would you, David?"

"Glad to, glad to." David went to perform the chore. It gave him a virtuous feeling to wait on Mallorey in this moment of need. It was not an onerous servitude, either, for it would bring its own reward.

"Why don't we go out on deck?" Selena suggested. Mallorey shook her head. "I don't think so. I'm not up to it."

"Of course you are."

Consuelo burst in on them, her hair flying, her flesh quivering, her navel showing insolently above the edge of her shorts.

"Let's do it now," Consuelo said. "I can't stand this any longer! Dump the stuff overboard and let's get back to shore. Or, hell, we could go down to Ensenada. Take all these people with us. The lawyer'll piss, but what can he do about it? He's stuck on board with the rest of us."

"I'm not up to a party," Mallorey said disapprovingly. "And I'd think you'd wait a while before going crazy."

"Listen, Mallorey, I'm not going to play the grieving widow. Joshua didn't expect me to. And, hey, you're going to get your piece of the pie sooner than you thought. He's got a buyer for *Moorea Cloud*. God, I can't wait to be living on dry land again!"

"What about Manny and the crew?" Mallorey asked.

Consuelo shrugged. "Oh, that's all taken care of. Joshua left instructions." Her voice turned bitter. "He left all sorts of instructions, for everything! He's dead and we're still following his orders. But I'm going to fox him. I'm going to buy myself a house in Malibu. That's a good place, Malibu, isn't it?" She looked to Mallorey for confirmation. "You lived there, didn't you?"

"Yes." Mallorey was silent for a long moment. "It's a lonely place if you don't have a few million dollars and aren't in The Business. Or don't know someone there to bring you into the scene."

"I've got enough money," Consuelo said carelessly. "And if I don't like living there I can always move. A house in Malibu is a good investment."

Mallorey and Selena looked at her in surprise. "Since when were you interested in investments?" Selena asked, curiosity prompting her to speak to Consuelo for the first time. That night in the restaurant Selena had been furious at Joshua's wife, humiliated by her public, easy seduction of Timmons. Now Selena no longer cared. That was a long time ago, in another, dead life, and she could talk to Consuelo as to another human being with only a faint residue of distaste left to make her voice cold.

"It's my money, now," Consuelo said reasonably. "The lawyer seems to think it'd be a good investment."

Selena and Mallorey looked at each other; and then they smiled in complete understanding. Consuelo's lawyer was going to have some difficult times ahead.

"You'll get along," Mallorey said. "There's no reason to worry about you."

"Nobody asked you to," Consuelo replied. She looked sternly at the box of ashes. "Let's get that over with. It's morbid and it isn't doing anybody any good."

Mallorey clutched at the box and then forced herself to relax. Her feelings of hunger for vestiges of Joshua were

beginning to fade. It was almost funny that Consuelo's matter-of-fact plans for the future had so changed the heavy atmosphere of the cabin. The widow was being sensible and sane while Mallorey was the one making everyone uneasy.

"Look," Consuelo said, "those freeloaders out there don't give a damn about Joshua. You're the only one who cares, Mallorey. So you have to decide how long this little joyride is going to continue before everyone can get back to their own business."

Consuelo left, trotting back out on deck, ignoring the people gathered to honor her husband.

"How about that?" Selena said rhetorically.

"Yes, how about it?" Mallorey smiled a twisted smile. "Joshua was so worried about her and he disliked her and was fond of her and really thought she was irresponsible."

"There's nothing like a little freedom to turn things around," Selena said. "Believe me, I know."

"I still don't like her," Mallorey said.

"You don't have to," Selena pointed out. "She has nothing to do with you." She hesitated, not wanting to ruffle Mallorey's feelings. "Don't you think it's time you turned loose? That's not Joshua in there."

Mallorey nodded and reached for her handbag. She took out a make-up kit and checked her face. "My eyes," she said.

"Dark glasses," Selena suggested.

"Too conspicuous. I can't mourn more than the bereaved spouse."

"Here," Selena offered, "take mine. They're plain lenses, but they're sun-sensors. They'll turn just dark enough to hide the weepies but they don't look serious."

"Thanks." Mallorey stood. She picked up the box holding the ashes. "How does it look?" she asked, putting on Selena's glasses.

"Elegant, as always."

Mallorey smiled. She looked down at the box she was

holding. "But this doesn't look right," she said.

They scanned the cabin for a more appropriate urn.

"The ice bucket," Mallorey said.

Selena emptied the ice bucket and Mallorey placed the cardboard box inside it.

"Cover it with a bar towel," Selena offered. "It looks kind of tacky that way."

They wrapped the box in a bar towel, tucking in the edges to make a neat package.

"All right," Mallorey said, sighing deeply, "I'm ready."

The two women walked out on deck. Selena caught Sonny DeLane's eye and motioned to him. He came over and stood next to Mallorey. "Is that Joshua?" he asked, eyeing the ice bucket.

"That's it."

"What do you want me to do?" he asked. Mallorey thought that at heart he was really a very sweet man.

"Use that million dollar voice," Selena said. "Call the meeting to order."

"I could say a prayer," Sonny offered.

"No, no prayers," Mallorey replied quickly. "Let's not be completely hypocritical about this thing. Oh, where's the crew? They should be here."

Selena pointed to the stern. "They're there, waiting. And the Greek chorus is up front."

The three of them looked at Consuelo's family, stoically waiting for this heathen ritual to begin.

"Okay," Mallorey said, "let's do it."

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Sonny called. His voice floated out over the crowd, silencing conversations.

"We're here to say good-bye to Joshua Quick," Sonny DeLane announced. "Does anyone want to say a few words?"

David started to step forward, thought better of it and stayed where he was.

"Then I will. We loved him, we admired him, we re-

spected him. And," Sonny said with a dramatic pause, "we will miss him."

Sonny turned to Malloreys, as if indicating where the spotlight should go. She leaned over the railing, tilted the ice bucket and tossed it overboard. It splashed into the water sideways. The ice bucket bobbed in the waves, floating off to starboard as *Moorea Cloud* chugged slowly along.

Some of the crew crossed themselves. Consuelo's mother wailed once. The ice bucket was half submerged. Then the ocean took it and it sank out of sight.

"Well," Sonny said, "that's over." He kissed Malloreys cheek. "Very touching," he said politely.

Malloreys looked up at him through the darkened lenses of Selena's sunglasses. His face was rigidly solemn. She looked around at the other faces, some of them bored, some of them uneasy. Viveca's expression was tense. Alec was scowling, scratching at his cast. Timmons was blank with washed-out confusion. David was looking so competent he must have been uneasy.

"Joshua would have laughed," Malloreys thought. She smiled at all of them. The conversations, the private business, the gossiping and bitching resumed.

"There will be a buffet," Malloreys announced "and the bar will remain open, of course."

She looked toward Consuelo for confirmation.

"We should be back at the Marina in an hour. Mrs. Quick joins me in thanking you for coming."

David had been holding Malloreys cognac. He gave it to her now. She sipped at it, feeling the burn of the alcohol cutting through some of the thickness in her stomach. She was suddenly ravenously hungry.

"I want some music," Consuelo said. "This is all too damn solemn."

"It wouldn't be right," David protested. "Music! Next you'll want to dance."

“Why not?” Consuelo asked. David was shocked. She was a heartless bitch, the worst he had ever met.

“Why not?” Mallorey agreed. “Quiet music. Sure. Why not?”

And the boat people of King’s Rest were amazed to see the *Moorea Cloud* return, her deck filled with waltzing couples. In a funny way it was a fitting finish for the legendary Joshua Quick.

XIX

Timmons had been avoiding her. They had had three sessions of ferocious love-making and then he had simply stopped talking to her. Viveca had spotted the exact moment when it happened, when Timmons had switched his attention from her to the next step in his life. She was sure he had not made a decision; he had simply gone on. It had been at the tournament, when he had heard the applause and the shrieks and whistles from all those young girls.

He had said good morning to her at that farce that passed for a funeral, good morning and then nothing more. He had not responded to her eye signals, he had ignored her attempts to engage him in conversation. Timmons had hung around David Nash, following him like a pilot fish after a shark, or like a puppy after a forbidden object.

And she had needed Timmons for a while longer. Things had changed since the night Alec had come home with his arm in a cast. His eyes had been different, more tired, more relaxed. And more judging. He watched Viveca all the time now, as if he was a visitor in an unfamiliar place, trying to puzzle out the habits of the natives.

Viveca nervously went about her life, rising at the usual hour, moving through the apartment in her normal way, trying to tell herself that nothing had changed. Alec's eyes were always on her and she found it increasingly difficult to walk or sit or work with him watching, weighing, analyzing.

"What's wrong?" she would ask him.

"Nothing," he would answer, and say no more. He kept

his appointments, he entertained old clients and potential customers, as he had in the past. But here, too, things had changed. His approach to those people was softer, more casual. He did not seem to worry about impressing them with his energy and forcefulness. The hearty manner was gone. Instead, he was low-keyed, presenting himself and his services almost carelessly, yet with more assurance than she had ever seen him display. Before, there had been his drive, a taut exposure of his talents, an almost boastful exhibition of his abilities, as if Alec was the product he was selling.

Now there were quiet suggestions, matter-of-fact discussions of the economic situation, short descriptions of problems to be overcome and opportunities to be met. In a way he was more reassuring to the men with whom he dealt. It did not reassure Viveca; it frightened her. She wondered if he no longer cared.

Even his laughter was different. She no longer recognized his voice when he spoke and joked. His jokes had changed. He no longer recounted exotic tales of his adventures and misdeeds. His humor was foreign to her. She had to listen closely now for she never knew what he was going to say. She missed the security of his old routines and stories.

“What’s wrong with you?” Viveca demanded.

“Nothing,” Alec said again, his voice cold. The coolness was directed at her. Before he broke his arm his voice had always been warm and full, yet there had been an underlying indifference she had found comfortable. They had lived parallel lives in each other’s presence, meeting only in challenge and counter-challenge. Now Alec addressed himself to her constantly, in that direct, pointed tone. She would have preferred that he ignore her: his attentions were making her uneasy.

Viveca had tried telephoning Timmons, but he was never at home. Once Alec came upon her as she hung up the telephone, an expression of annoyance on her face.

"Who was that?" Alec asked and in an unguarded moment Viveca answered: "Timmons. He's not home. He's never home anymore." Then she realized how it sounded and turned quickly away from her husband.

"You can't expect him to live to serve you," Alec said reasonably. And then he recognized the reaction in her eyes, the turning away, and knew that she had slept with that boy, that weak, trashy boy.

All his rage rose to the surface. He became aware, for the first time, how he resented everything she had made them do to each other. He suddenly could not understand how he had put up with her. Guilt was not enough reason. Viveca had had time to adjust; others had adjusted to the kind of move she had been forced to make. And very few of those others had had a fortune to cushion the shock.

"We should have been poor," Alec said aloud. "It would have been better."

Viveca looked at him, confused. Why was Alec talking about being poor? Why ever would he want to be poor? She became more uneasy. There had been too many changes in him, too many things said that made no sense to her. She could no longer predict how he would act. It was not that he had become uncivilized or impolite, it was simply that he was no longer familiar to her.

"And why the hell did you have to do it with Timmons?" Alec asked. He waited for a reply and then walked out of the apartment, leaving Viveca stunned and fearful. So, he had caught it, had understood. But he had never complained before, never in all the years they had been together. She had felt perfectly at ease with her little adventures, knowing that Alec condoned them. They had never discussed her infidelities. It had been an accepted part of their lives. It was not as if she was constantly unfaithful. Occasionally, not very often, Viveca succumbed to an edgy curiosity or a tender leaning toward a man. It had never been important,

she thought. She had once known that her escapades, which was how she thought of them, usually came in times of stress, but she had forgotten that. She developed fondnesses when she was depressed, it was that simple. But most often the strains of her life were resolved in stunts.

She had always been civilized and discrete. If she did not hide her little affairs, she did not flaunt them. She had believed the unspoken agreement between Alec and herself to be still in effect.

Evidently there was something about Timmons he could not stomach. Or maybe it was the change. Viveca thought he might be suffering a mid-life crisis. The idea pleased her: it would explain so much.

Alec roamed the marina, looking over the boats like any other sightseer. He realized that in the years they had lived here he had not met many of the boat people, had not made friends in what was one of the easiest fraternities to enter. He had rarely spent afternoons on board other yachts. There had been occasional cocktail parties, but they were incidental. One might just as well have been in an apartment on those occasions, so un-nautical had they been.

He wondered why they still owned their yacht. They rarely used it anymore, even for business.

‘‘Paying slip fees for nothing,’’ he thought. In that moment he came to a decision: he would sell *Nenuphar*. He would not even keep the Riva; he would sell it at the same time. His mind was made up just that quickly and he felt lighter for having made the decision, freed of an intolerable weight.

‘‘Might as well, right now,’’ Alec thought and, reversing the direction in which he was walking, he headed for a yacht brokerage, one of several that flourished in the marina. He wondered idly how much the two boats were worth now, admitting to himself that, in a strange way, he would feel better if he lost money on the sale. It would be a proper

ending to the past, or a chastening introduction to their future.

He was disappointed. Fate was going to give him a profit. A combination of inflation, and the scarcity of slip space in the marina saw to that. There were so few slips available that some people bought yachts in order to obtain the slips in which they lay. *Nenuphar* and the *Riva* would be a fairly quick sale. The broker thought he had one or two customers who might be interested. Alec put his signature to a brokerage contract, informed the agent that the yacht and *Riva* were to be sold as they were, and left.

On his way back to the anchorage where *Nenuphar* lay in neglected splendor, Alec realized that he had not discussed the matter with Viveca. He had decided to sell the yacht on a whim. *Nenuphar* was half hers, even though her name was not on the title.

“The hell with it,” he thought, and proceeded to clean out their personal possessions from the yacht’s many cupboards. There were a few clothes on board. Alec left the food in the cabinets, the liquor in the bar, salvaging only a bottle of twenty-five year old cognac.

He took a long, slow stroll to the supermarket, returning with three large cartons into which he packed everything he had decided to keep. There were linens aboard, and dishes and silverware. There were toilet articles and books, light reading suitable for long lazy days at sea. They had been unused for months. He left them. He left his tools, taking only a favorite wrench. He took the cassettes of classical music and left the popular stuff for the next owner. He left all the safety equipment, the foul weather gear, the collection of plano-lensed sunglasses. He placed the three cartons outside the door to the cabin and looked around the deck for one last time.

There were two boys wandering the dock, looking at the boats with the self-conscious curiosity of amateurs. “Hey,”

Alec called to them. "Would you give me a hand?"

They looked at one another and then came carefully forward. They were faintly grubby in appearance, obvious outsiders. He wondered how they had gotten through the security controls at the end of the dock. The guards were usually prompt to stop strangers.

"I have to carry these three cartons to the marina office," he said. "Do you think you could help me?"

The boys agreed and clambered on board quickly. Alec said nothing to them about their leather-soled shoes. They helped him carry the cartons to the courtesy office in the small building at the far end of the dock.

"That's a nice boat," one of the boys said. He sounded excited at taking even this meager part in the life of the marina. He had probably heard stories about how swinging it all was.

"Yes, she is nice," Alec said. "I'm selling her, though."

"Too bad," the boy said, man to man. "She's a beauty." He slid the feminine pronoun down his tongue with obvious enjoyment.

"You want to see a real beauty," Alec said. "go over to Portofino and take a look at *Moorea Cloud*. That's Joshua Quick's ship."

"Oh, that old guy."

"Yes, that old guy," Alec said ruefully. "But never mind about that. It's just a beautiful yacht. And she's being sold, too."

"How come everyone's selling their boats?" the taller of the two boys asked. They had stacked Alec's cartons inside the office and were standing at the edge of the dock now, looking down at the scummy water. It was forbidden to dump the contents of the chemical toilets into the harbor, but evidently people were breaking the law.

"Some people get tired of it," Alec said, "and some people can no longer afford it, and some people die."

The two boys seemed to think that over. They probably

believed that everyone with a boat was rich, so rich that death and boredom and financial strain could not reach them.

"Uh, did someone die?" the shorter boy asked. "Is that why you're selling your boat?"

Alec looked at him in surprise. "Uh, well," Alec said, "come to think of it, I'm not sure."

The boys' expressions became wary. They obviously thought him slightly crazy. "We gotta be going," the taller one said.

"Sure. Thanks for your help." Alec put out his hand.

They shook hands gingerly and then hurried away. He watched them go, seeing how they punched at each other playfully, the punches harder than necessary in an attempt to relieve their embarrassment and unease.

Viveca was indignant. "What do you mean you've put *Nenuphar* up for sale?"

Alec was stretched out on a lounge chair. He turned his face away from her.

"Answer me!" Viveca demanded. "How dare you make a decision like that without asking me?"

Alec tried to scratch the skin under his cast, using a thin knitting needle to reach the spot that was itching so intolerably.

"Will you stop poking around in there and talk to me!" Viveca screeched.

"Shut up, Viveca," Alec said. "You sound like a fish-wife."

"I thought we made decisions together," Viveca said, lowering her voice to a discrete threat. "I thought we consulted with each other before taking a big step like that."

"We don't use the damn thing," Alec said. "We have two slips on which we pay a ransom in rent. The Riva just sits there, rotting. We've a fortune tied up in non-essentials and we don't even enjoy owning them."

"What are you up to?" Viveca asked suspiciously.
"What are you planning?"

"Nothing. Just freeing us of unnecessary burdens."

"For what reason? Why are you selling everything we own? Everything I love?"

Alec chose not to remind Viveca that she had not been on board the yacht in weeks. The more he thought about it, the more he was convinced he had done the right thing. He could sense that Viveca's rage was not about the boat itself but about the fact that something she had thought permanent and immutable no longer belonged to her. Since Viveca had lost her home and her country, possessions had become of primary importance to her. She clung so ferociously to things because she had not yet been able to find a place she could call her own. And, above all, she blamed Alec for her loss, although she would never admit it.

"You're talking like a snob," he said in a mild tone. It was a provocative thing to say, yet he could not help himself. There was so much rage in him that he felt it only fair that she suffer a little.

"A snob!" Viveca was aghast. And then angry. Alec seemed to be saying that she wanted *Nenuphar* for social status. A part of her, the buried honesty that still existed in her, agreed with him. Another part of her was in mourning at the loss of one more of the symbols of safety on which she had come to depend.

Viveca glared at Alec. "You're punishing me," she said. "How childish of you." Any guilt she might have felt at her little affair with Timmons vanished, overcome by what she considered Alec's unforgivable behavior.

"You used to treat me like an equal," Viveca said. "Suddenly you've turned into. . ." she searched for the proper description of Alec's new attitude. ". . . a jealous, possessive, infantile, American husband."

"It's all very well to talk about being equal," Alec said coolly. "And perhaps it's my fault too, but our equality

seems to have faded into self-indulgence. We were equal on the farm, remember? There was never any place for who was boss there. And on safari. We each pulled our own weight. But since we've come here you've turned into a . . ." he cast about for a devastating word and found it. ". . . a *hostess*."

"For you," Viveca said indignantly. "I've been a hostess for you!"

Alec shrugged. "I don't think so. You've descended into gossip and prying and superficial intrigue. My fault, too; I never should have indulged you for so long. It's come to the point where you'd rather be titillated than interested. And you don't do anything."

Viveca started to protest but Alec stopped her. "I know: you take the ladies to lunch. Thank you. And you charm the men at dinner. Thank you. But who cares? Who really cares? Even our stunts, hell, no, *your* stunts are nothing. You haven't risked anything in years."

Viveca's rage was so strong that her vision blurred. "You broke your arm so that makes you a hero, is that it?" she demanded. "I come out unscathed and that means I'm not risking my arse?"

"You haven't risked your arse in a long time," Alec answered laconically. He did not bother giving the word "arse" a twist. Only a few weeks earlier he might have kidded her about it.

"You bloody idiot," she whispered. "What about the para-sail?"

Alec smiled at her sarcastically. "Come on," he said.

Viveca turned away. Her indignation was tempered by the knowledge that, in this case, he was right. There had been only one real moment of danger with the para-sail, the moment when she went into the water. She had been able to handle it. All the danger had been by implication, not in fact. She had cheated and he had known it. He had patronized her by his silence.

"Well, what then?" she asked, turning on him in fury.

"What do you want me to do? Come on, think of something! You want me to jump from a plane without a chute? Would that satisfy your criteria of real danger?"

Alec inspected his wife, seeing the anger and desperation in her face. She was worried and confused and it was making her foolish and careless. It was almost as if she was asking for the irreparable to happen, goading him to say or do something extreme. Alec suddenly knew that, tired as he was of this Viveca, he still loved the old Viveca, the Viveca he had married, the wife with whom he had shared so much stress and danger, so many placid times, so much work and life. That woman still had to be there, somewhere inside this glittering, superficial lady standing before him.

"I'll think of something," he said. "And for once you'll have to measure up like you used to. No more of that soft, marina flash that's all show and no substance."

"Well, what?" Viveca demanded. "Name it."

Alec got up from the lounge chair and walked away from her. He leaned against the terrace coping and looked out over the marina. He could no longer recognize *Nenuphar*. It was lost in the mass of boats below. He was not interested enough to separate *Nenuphar* from all that confusion of decks and masts. He looked away from the boats, staring straight down at the canopy protecting the entrance to the building in which they lived. An idea came to him. He looked up, to the top of the spire, measuring; then he looked down again.

"How're your arms?" he asked Viveca. "How're your hands? They tough? Or have you gotten all soft and lady-like?"

"They're as hard as I need, you bahrstard," Viveca said, her accent strengthened by emotion.

"I hope you're right," Alec said. "They'd better be for this stunt. There's going to be nothing to save your *arse* this time except you." Now, he gave the word a vicious turn.

"What is it?" Viveca demanded.

"How would you like to rappel down the side of this building, my love?" he asked. "We'll tie a rope to a stanchion right here on the terrace and you just lower yourself to the ground."

For a moment Viveca thought he had gone mad. The Timmons business must have unhinged him. They were on the fifteenth floor above the lobby and the lobby, itself, rose two storeys. Viveca felt a scream building inside herself. She swallowed it.

"It's higher than the forty foot dive you claimed," she said with admirable restraint. "And there's no ocean to cushion my fall."

"So you refuse, is that it? You've lost all sense of risk, have you? No more trust in yourself, old girl?"

"Bloody idiot," Viveca muttered.

"If you don't trust yourself," Alec said, "Do you trust me? I'll help lower you. You just hang on to the rope, nice and passive, and I'll let you down. How's that?"

"Not bloody likely," Viveca said. A few years ago she might have done it with no second thought. They had climbed mountains together many times and many times he had helped belay her as she rappelled down a rock face. But this was different.

"We've done it before," Alec said, as if reading her thoughts. "What's changed?"

"Nothing's changed," Viveca said, "except you."

"But I haven't," Alec insisted. "I'm my old self again. And since you claim that you haven't changed, either, then, logically. . . ."

He felt sorry for her even as he felt venomous and angry.

"If you're afraid," he said, knowing how those words would affect her, knowing that Viveca had never admitted to fear, had always hidden it, risen above it. She had always displayed courage. In some ways her courage had been greater than his own for he knew that he sometimes played

men's games, games involving a certain amount of childish bravado. Viveca had always gone quietly and firmly about her business, doing what had to be done, testing herself, and him, with a firm will.

"All right!" Viveca said. "I'll do it." She paused and then continued in an acid voice: "If you can find a rope long enough."

"No audience," Alec said. "This is just you and me."

"No audience," she agreed.

Viveca walked over to the edge of the terrace and looked down. She was not sure that her arms were strong enough, but she would not admit it to him. It had been a long time since she had lifted and carried weights heavy enough to build muscles and stamina. The occasional swim or game of tennis was not enough to give her the strength she would need. She looked for a way to save herself and saw that every apartment had a terrace or balcony. She could not beat pitons into the cement face of the building, but she could fasten check ropes every two storeys or so.

"When do you want to do this?" Alec asked. "Take your time, of course."

"Whenever you want," Viveca snapped. "Within the week, if you like."

Alec nodded. "The sooner the better," he agreed. "Give you less time to worry about it and tighten up."

Viveca turned and sauntered away from him, determined not to show how worried she was, how fearful and unsure. She paused at the door and said: "When do you want to go buy the line? I'm going with you, of course. Since we're sharing the responsibility again. That *is* right, isn't it?"

"You bet your arse," Alec said solemnly.

She nodded sharply: that was exactly what she was betting.

The phone calls David had received after the tournament

had been very satisfying. Everyone had been flattering and complimentary, praising him for the organization, for the atmosphere, for the gesture toward Joshua, implying a clever sense of timing and commiserating with him on Joshua's death, as if he had lost a brother. He thought his reputation had been enhanced past all his hopes. The fact that people believed he was the guiding hand behind the tournament was no accident. David had wanted it that way and had seen to it. Denny Brock had been surprisingly cooperative, not complaining when David had simply listed him as chairman of the event, not saying a thing about David's name being so evident in every aspect of the foundation and the tournament.

There were a few things bothering David, however. Selena had not shown up to help him handle the telephone calls and mail. She had simply telephoned to say she had a job elsewhere and avoided telling him where, even when he insisted. David found out, by chance, that she was now working as a social events coordinator for a large corporation in the city. He also heard that she had been seen at a gathering at the house of one of the area's most prominent attorneys, one of those men whose reputation, and client list, David envied.

David grudgingly admitted that the girl was on her way. It was a serious try, too. She was too old to be making it only on looks in this part of the country. Twenty-seven was over-the-hill in a land where the flash of leg and sun-tanned innocence took the place of a resume or previous experience. Those girls were eighteen and nineteen and they worked their way into grace and favor employment through the use of a studied, healthy sexiness. Selena had worked the tournament to her own advantage, without resorting to those pool-party techniques. David would not have been surprised if he found out that she finally went to law school, sponsored by her new friends. He felt slightly cheated: if she had stuck around a little longer he would have opened doors for her, himself.

David had been expecting to be approached by someone after the tournament. He had waited for one of the city's top law firms to begin negotiating with him about joining them, becoming a partner. He had looked forward to the bargaining, the opening moves, the invitations to lunch or to a tennis game at a private court. While it was true that he had only one client, King's Rest, the tournament should have made him saleable. It would have had a soothing effect on him, knowing that he was in demand. But so far there had been nothing. He calmed himself with the knowledge that he now had a chance to learn the business of representing a public personality. If he succeeded with Timmons he would automatically be a force to be reckoned with; if he failed, nobody would be hurt, except Timmons. And that was of no matter.

But nobody had telephoned him. He wondered what they were waiting for.

Another worrisome thing was that the financial statements of the Joshua Quick Foundation, and the tournament, had not yet been sent to him for his inspection and signature. He knew it was just a detail, he knew that he must not expect that there would be a great profit, but time was passing and the accountant had not appeared.

David knew that Dennis Brock must also have been waiting with some impatience to see the results of his generosity. It was only ego gratification for Denny, of course, but he would have to be presented the financial reports with ceremony, if David was to keep him in line. David knew that there would be difficult moments after Denny saw how much money his contributions had generated. There would be days of confusion as Denny Brock decided how the Foundation would disburse its largesse. He hoped he would be able to make Denny spend the money wisely. But, more important, he would have to begin preparing him now for next year, for the next tournament. This first one had been arranged in haste. With a year before them in which to make plans they were sure to be even more successful.

David had tried to reach Brock on the telephone several times but the marina's owner was away, or out of the office, or tied up and sure to call back when he had a free moment. The same male voice always asked David if it was urgent and when David assured him that there was nothing pressing the voice would repeat that Mr. Brock would call the moment he was free. David waited.

As the days passed David became more and more irritated. The accountant still had not produced the financial reports. It was Denny Brock's fault, of course. He had been the one to hire the man. Their usual accounting firm had not been good enough: Denny had wanted an independent accountant handling the foundation.

"I just bet he's somebody's brother-in-law," David groaned to himself. "Whenever Denny takes it into his head to do someone a favor I always have to clean up the mess afterward."

A small twinge of uneasiness trickled through his stomach. If the accountant fouled things up he, David, would be responsible. His name was listed as the person with fiduciary responsibility and everyone thought that the entire affair was of his doing. It suddenly occurred to him that he should have shared the responsibility, legally, and in the publicity handouts.

"Denny would not have brought in a total incompetent," David told himself reassuringly. If there was one thing he felt confident of it was Denny Brock's business acumen. Yet, somehow, David was uneasy. A terrible need to see Denny came over him. He wanted to hear Denny tell him that everything was under control, that the accountant was a responsible man, that he knew what he was doing.

It took three more days to reach Denny Brock. Fifteen minutes after a short, angry telephone conversation, David was sitting in Brock's office, feeling pale and shaken.

"Denny," David said, mustering all the forcefulness he could find beneath his confusion, "what do you mean, what

do I mean? I haven't seen the financial report yet."

"I have," Denny said. "It's okay." The man sat on the far side of his ridiculously large desk, protected by that huge expanse of wood and souvenirs, blandly refusing to let David see the financial statement. His eyelids were half-lowered. He looked like a sleepy snapping turtle.

Sylv sat on the couch next to David. His face was expressionless.

"The foundation will have to produce the financial statement for the I.R.S.," David said, feeling hysteria building within him.

Denny made a vague gesture with both hands. "Sure. But there's plenty of time."

"I have to sign it," David insisted. "How can I sign it if I haven't seen it?"

"Don't worry," Denny said. He slid deeper into his chair and began rocking back and forth. The swivel squeaked as the seat moved.

"Well," David said with a forced laugh, "did the foundation make any money?"

"No," Denny said. He chewed his lip and added: "You might say it lost money."

"How could it?" David asked, puzzled. "According to the informal figures I've been keeping, we should have made a little. Of course you can't expect to make a bundle the first time out, but when you establish a tournament, and then repeat it over several years, your return invariably grows." He looked hard at Denny Brock. "You *are* planning a tournament for next year, aren't you? It couldn't have been such an enormous loss that you'd just forget the whole thing?"

"We'll see," Denny said vaguely, "when the time comes."

"Denny," David asked, "what the hell are you doing?"

Denny did not answer him but continued rocking back and forth, a bored look on his face. Sylv exhaled noisily.

"I insist you let me see the report," David said loudly.

"And why did it come straight to you? It should have come to me."

Denny rocked. The chair squeaked. Sylv smiled meaninglessly, looking at empty air.

"Show him the report," Denny said suddenly to Sylv. His voice was grating and impatient, like a parent deciding to indulge a foolish child, or an employer in haste to rid himself of a troublesome problem.

Sylv rose from the couch and left the room. He returned a minute later, carrying a red folder.

"Thank you," David said, struggling to keep from grabbing the folder from Sylv's hands. "You'll excuse me while I look it over."

He scanned the first page, turned to the second, and froze. "What's this?" David asked, hoping his voice would not break. "What are these consultant fees?"

"Consultants," Denny said shortly. "You hired me as a consultant."

"Did I hire Sylv, too?" David asked drily. "What kind of consulting did he do to have earned ten thousand dollars?" He skimmed the rest of the report. "What are you trying to pull?" David asked, his voice desperate now. Fees had been paid to people of whom he had never heard. There were even corporations listed as having consulted on the running of the tournament. Some of the corporations were in other states.

David slammed the cover shut and rolled the report up into a club. "Are you crazy?" he shouted, his two hands clenched around the financial statement.

"You wanted to sign it," Denny said heavily. "So sign it."

"No wonder there were no profits," David shouted. "You've milked the damn thing dry! I won't sign this piece of crap!"

Sylv was grinning. He was looking at David with a satisfied air, as if a dumb student had begun to understand what was expected of him.

"I'll *never* put my signature on this!" David repeated. Denny Brock did not blink. "It doesn't matter," he said. "Your name is on it, signature or no signature."

David was stunned. He sat back in his chair, unable to speak.

"We did some business," Denny Brock said. "We made a little money. You were happy: you were running the show. You gave me some good advice, kid. But in this business it's play and pay. So now we go on to something else."

"And leave me holding the bag," David said hoarsely. Denny shrugged.

"You slick son of a bitch," David whispered.

"You ain't seen nothing . . ." Sylv said and then stopped. Denny's eyes had opened for a second, cutting the sentence off before he could finish it.

"What else?" David demanded. "What other shit are you trying to pull?"

"Listen," Brock said, "you had a very nice little run here. You made a few, didn't you? You got yourself some nice contacts. I never asked you what you had going on the side, did I? I thought you'd profit from the opportunity. That's it, kid, I'm a guy who gives people opportunities to better themselves. You've been living good, lots of people you like all around you. You got in with the right crowd, you coulda stashed something away. I didn't blame you for having your eye on bigger things. We never held you back. It was a terrific set-up for whatever game you wanted to run. Hell, it's been a terrific set-up for all of us." Denny held up his hand to stop David from interrupting him. "We all know the rules, right? Money is honey. And the other part is: you take your chances and if you play you pay."

"What the hell are you talking about?" David asked. "What is all this shit about not wanting to hold me back and taking chances? I've worked my butt off for King's Rest. I had so few things on the side that I did *not* 'stash something away,' as you've intimated. You've had my complete effort

and loyalty. So just what the hell are you saying? Are you firing me? Is that it?"

Denny looked at him with pity. It was the first time David had ever seen that expression on his face. It did not last long: it was replaced by contempt. 'Fire you? What the hell would I want to fire you for? I'm counting on you sticking around.' He smiled at David. David wished the smile would disappear. It looked like death grinning at him.

"You haven't understood a thing, have you?" Denny Brock asked. "You know you fooled me for a long time, kid. I thought you understood everything and were just doing the number in your own got-rocks style. What was that school you went to? Stanford Business?"

Denny Brock knew well what schools David had gone to. David remembered that Stanford Business had been one of the attractions for Denny when he had hired him all those years ago. It had been a real kick, hiring someone from the best business school in the country: 'No matter what Harvard claims,' David had told Denny when they first met.

"Will you please tell me. . . ." David said, not wanting to plead, trying somehow to re-establish his position as lawyer, counselor, guide. He suddenly knew that he had never been that. He had been a tutor in the niceties of the law, a legal go-fer, another Sylv.

"Jeezus, kid," Denny Brock said, shaking his head. "I could never figure what you were doing. I couldn't trace any investments you made. I thought you had so many fronts to hide behind that the money would never be found. You remember when you bought the house in Brentwood? I thought that was one of your open investments, that you knew something, or that you were using it for the I.R.S. So I bought a piece of Brentwood, figuring: this kid's got contacts, he knows what's going down. I own six parcels in Brentwood, kid. Six parcels. Then you got that divorce and gave the house to your Ex. I thought: hell, he's been planning the move for two years. I gotta admit when you left her the

Rolls I thought you were overdoing it. But, what the hell, it's a question of style, right? Class, right? You fed her some shit stocks. Kid, that was beautiful. But then," Denny's voice became sad, "I couldn't figure out why you held on to King's Rest stock. I'd of thought that you would've slipped them to her, too. But, kid, you gave her your A.T.&T."

"So? I gave her the A.T.&T. So what? And how did you find out. . . ."

"Kid, you didn't hear me. You *held on* to King's Rest! That set me thinking." He shook his head. "And then you *moved in* to King's Rest. And then, kid, I couldn't believe it, you took perks from the corporation instead of cash. You could've asked to paid in green, kid, and you didn't. I couldn't figure it."

David stared at Denny, completely lost. What was the man telling him?

"Dave," Denny said, "tell me something. Do you know what business we're in, here at King's Rest?"

David looked at him blankly. "Of course I know," he said.

"Tell me, Dave. Tell me what business we're in," Denny said, almost kindly.

"Real estate development, leasing the marina, services."

Denny shook his head. Sylv was smiling. "No, kid, that's not the business we're in," Denny said softly, almost sadly. "Dave, I think you better make up your mind how you're going to handle this. Sign the statement or give it back to me. It won't make much difference, but you can choose the way it'll go down."

David rose, clutching the financial report. "I'm keeping this," he said fiercely. "And I'm not signing it."

Denny seemed resigned. "If you're sure that's what you want," he said. "I have no objection."

David did not even hear him, did not stop to wonder why he should not keep a copy of the financial report. His mind did not work like Denny's did. All he could think of, in his

anger, was that he had always been four steps behind Denny Brock, following the sign-posts that Denny had chosen to place for him along the road Denny had chosen for him to walk.

The frightening thing now was that he did not know what was coming next. He could not even guess. The one thing he knew for sure was that he would have a hard time with the Internal Revenue Service. They would have questions he would have a hard time answering.

"Take it easy," Denny said. "There's nothing personal in this, kid."

It was the cruelty of it all that shocked David the most. He could understand that it was only business to Denny but David could not help but take it personally. It horrified him that Denny had delved into his personal finances, had invaded his privacy, had been controlling David's business life at the time David had been so sure he was controlling Denny.

He went back to his office and knew that it had never been his office. It was simply a place where Denny Brock had kept him, the kindergarten in which he had been put to play with fingerpaints and blocks while Denny conducted his real, adult business elsewhere. Whatever that business was.

The thought came to him that his apartment was not his. Nor was his automobile. They both belonged to King's Rest. He remembered Denny saying something about perks.

"I won't starve," David told himself. He felt panicky and poor, knowing that the job was over. No other firm would hire him now until he cleared up things with Internal Revenue. He tried to estimate how much time that would take. "I have the treasury notes and the King's Rest stock," David thought. "I can always sell that back to Denny." He realized, with dread, that Denny Brock would not buy back the King's Rest stock. Denny wanted to keep him linked to the corporation. It would make David seem even more responsible for the irregularities in the foundation's finances.

He stared at the walls of his office. "Why am I panicking?" he asked himself. "I'm a damn good lawyer. I can figure a way out of this." A feeling of rebelliousness came over him. "Why should I even think of selling out? I've been had and I don't know what it's all about but I can figure it out. It can't be that complicated if Denny Brock is behind it. And if he has a hold on me as long as I have the stock, it works both ways."

He had been ready to fire his secretary, ready to pack his law books and leave. Now he was determined to see it through.

"Hell," David told himself, "the answer has to be obvious. The man is too primitive to do anything really clever. He's just an uneducated boor who flies by the seat of his pants. Look at the trick with the 'consultants.' Pretty simple-minded."

He knew that there had to be a way to regain control of matters. It was too complicated to think through right now. He'd figure it out later, when he had calmed down.

"I need a drink and a good dinner," David told himself. He was looking for therapy, not enjoyment. "I'll call Malloreys," he thought reflexively. "She's probably lonely by now."

It came to him, suddenly, that he did not really want to see her. She was a lost cause and not worth the effort he had expended on her. "Dumb broad," he said to himself. "I've wasted enough time on her. She wasn't that great in bed."

David ate dinner at the Spire Club with Timmons and Sonny DeLane. He found them amazingly good company. And he laughed at one or two of Sonny's jokes, and agreed with Timmons that a high-cholesterol diet was just asking for it.

XX

Viveca had had a difficult time getting hold of the neighbors and securing their permission but she had managed finally. The building was marred now with check ropes hanging from every other balcony and terrace, beige strings like stiff spaghetti seen from afar. The strings swayed in the breeze. An occasional gust of wind caught the ropes and bent and tossed them into slapping, kinking swirls against the white of the spire.

"High wind," Alec said. It was more than just a comment; it was an invitation to Viveca to forget the stunt. She ignored him and leaned further over the edge, checking on the position of the ropes she had set.

"Looks okay," she answered him. Viveca was wearing a sweatsuit and soft slippers with rough heavy soles. Her hands were covered in wool and leather and she played with a small rosin bag, tossing it up and down and from hand to hand, white puffs of dust rising from it which each slap against her gloved palms. She tucked the rosin bag into the long scarf she had wrapped around her waist, clapped her hands together to dislodge the excess powder and said: "Might as well do it."

Alec nodded, checking the rope tied securely around the stanchion. "I'd rather belay you," he said, not wanting to show his worry. "I don't trust that thing to bear your weight."

"It's tougher than you are," Viveca said coldly. "Leave it alone." She sniffed irritably. Alec could not tell if the irrita-

tion was caused by him or by the rosin dust. "Besides," she added, "you'd be working with one hand. What the hell good is that?"

"Whatever makes you feel more comfortable," he said, angry at having shown his uneasiness.

"Yeah, well, here we go," Viveca said. Holding on to the rope she climbed up on to the terrace ledge, took a half-turn of the rope around her body and lowered herself carefully over the edge. The line straightened with a snap as it took her weight. Alec could see the wind whipping her hair about her face. "You better walk it," he cautioned. "This breeze is liable to catch you a good one if you try to rappel."

"I'll see how it goes," Viveca said, her voice almost lost in the wind as she looked down, past her feet, to the top of the canopy many storeys below.

She was supporting her weight on her right arm and shoulder and on her feet pressed against the wall. There had been a time when she had had what climbers called "atomic" feet, strong, unshakeable, intelligent feet that never missed a foothold, a crevice, the smallest outcropping. Viveca had loved the intricacies of climbing with mechanical aids, the carabiner snap rings, the stirrup-like atriers. She had loved clinging to a mountain wall, listening to the blacksmith sound of pitons being hammered into barren rock. Now it was different. Time had passed and there was just Viveca and the rope and the wall.

"I'm going to give it a try," she said, pushing off from the building. The rope slid through her hand as she bounded out and away, lowering herself a good ten feet before braking her fall by tightening her hold on the line. Her left arm was held carefully out behind her, aiding her balance and guiding the trailing end of the long rope well away from her body. She swung back heavily, landing with bent knees to take up the force of her return against the cement wall. Her hold on the rope slipped slightly. She tightened her grip further, feeling

the ache and strain in an arm no longer trained to this sort of exercise. A check rope was within reach, a loop tied in it at the proper height. For a moment Viveca wished that she had set ariars down the length of the building. Viveca placed her left foot in the sketchy stirrup and rested her weight evenly on the two thin lines.

She looked down. The ground seemed just as far away. "What the bloody hell am I doing here?" she thought. She was worried. That first rappel had confirmed what she had known: she was out of shape. She had lost the strength in her arms and shoulders that would have allowed her to finish this stunt in safety.

"You resting?" Alec asked.

"Just figuring it out," Viveca said.

"Okay. Take your time." He could see the crinkling in the gloves and imagined how desperately she was holding on to the rope. There was no confidence in the way she was holding herself.

"That check rope working out?" he called down.

"Yes."

She wished he would stop asking such stupid questions. He was just trying to annoy her, to goad her into a thoughtless flight down the building. She would not be pushed. She would take this at her own speed.

"I'm not going to be able to rappel," Viveca admitted to herself. She could see her grip loosening, could see herself falling, the rope flying out of her grasp. "I'd better walk it down."

She checked the position of the coil around her body. The tension had to be accurate: too tight and the rope would burn painfully through her clothing; too loose and she might slip and fall.

Viveca rid herself of the check rope and swung herself further out onto the wall. She stiffened her knees, took a half-twist of line around her wrist, checked the tension in the

rope and began to walk backward down the wall. It felt awkward. She walked carefully, aware of the great emptiness behind and beneath her. It seemed to take forever to reach the next check rope. She pushed her foot into the loop gratefully.

“You okay?” Alec called. The wind scooped up the second word and wafted it away.

Viveca looked into the terrace from which she was suspended. She could see charcoal dust from a ratty little barbecue laying in a puddle of black on the terrazzo floor. The people did not take very good care of their furniture. It was bleached and faded; cheap, mismatched pieces that should have been thrown away long ago. The drapes inside the apartment were drawn against the sun. She tried to remember who lived in that apartment and could not.

She realized that Alec had been calling her.

“What is it?” she shouted. She was talking to the interstices of the patio fence. Somehow, she could not raise her head to look up at him.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

She was about to shout up at him to leave her alone, that she was all right, that she was just resting, when a great wave of despair came over her. She was not all right. She was paralyzed. The emptiness at her back, the sense of space beneath her feet hit her with full force.

“God, don’t look down,” she groaned, tightening her already fierce hold on the ropes.

“Viv!” Alec had shouted her name. He had not used the diminutive in years. She tried to remember when he had started calling her Viveca but could not.

“Are you stuck?” he called.

Pride fought with panic. She did not want to admit that she had frozen like some green kid but she knew she was in trouble. Reality won out.

“Yes, I’m stuck,” she shouted, not knowing how she managed to force the words past her teeth.

"Get up on that terrace," he ordered.

"I don't want to," Viveca shouted.

"Just get up in there for a minute," Alec called. "I'm going to send a knife down to you."

Viveca pulled herself up onto the terrace. She was safe now. The feeling of relief was overwhelming. It was followed by a sense of fatigue, a complete, racking tiredness that made her slump to the floor. She sat there, still clutching both ropes, looking at the spent, meaningless coils of nylon that snaked over and around her lap.

"Here it comes," Alec called. She pushed herself upright and leaned against the parapet. A thin line came bobbing down to her. Tied to the end of it was Alec's old hunting knife. She grabbed for it and pulled it in, untying the supply line and pushing it back out over the emptiness. The line disappeared upward.

"Leave yourself about twenty feet beyond where you are now," Alec shouted.

"I know, I know," Viveca said wearily. She pulled the main rope up toward her, measuring an extra twenty feet and severing the rest with short, sawing strokes. The unusable line slithered out of her hands and fell. She turned her head away, not wanting to see the long drop.

"Saddle up," Alec called.

Viveca stood and passed the rope over and across her body and between her legs in a double figure eight. She secured the primitive body harness with a double hitch and wrapped the tail end one more time around her body, finishing it off with a simple granny knot.

"Okay?" Alec called.

"Just a minute," Viveca shouted up at him. She removed the gloves and tossed them away. She hooked Alec's knife through the scarf belt at her waist. Then she rosined her hands thoroughly and tossed the rosin bag aside.

"Okay," Viveca called. "I'm coming out onto the face." She could not move. She did not want to move. She wanted

to stay right there until someone came home and opened up the terrace door and let her walk through their apartment and take the elevator upstairs. No matter how long it took before the people came home. Even if she had to spend the night on the terrace. She realized that she had said that she was coming out onto the face; she had used a word from their mountaineering days. It had been automatic. She felt extremely foolish, comparing then with now. Then she dismissed the embarrassment: there was no time for such trivialities.

Viveca clambered out onto the wall and hung there for a moment, holding on to the check rope for safety.

“You ready?” Alec called down to her.

“Just a second,” Viveca shouted. She was talking to the wall again, to the wall and the terrace and her own fear. She could not let go of the check rope even though she knew she must.

“Heads up!” Alec called and she felt a whistling breeze and a thump as another line came sailing down out of the sky. She looked at it in surprise: Alec had sent her a belaying rope.

“Get on with it, Viv,” he yelled. “The wind’s rising.”

“Okay. Coming up!”

The climb was agonizing, yet swifter than she had thought possible. Viveca kept her eyes on the wall, unwilling to look to either side for fear she would lose her nerve. Her feet slid and stumbled against the facing of the building. She scraped her ankles, her toes, her instep. Her hands slipped and grabbed and gripped as the rosin wore off through friction and sweat. The rope burned in her hands, around her wrist, between her legs. Her hip sockets ached. She did not notice whether there was any slack in the rope or not as she scrambled up the wall.

Then, suddenly, she was level with her own terrace and then she was rolling over the ledge, slipping forward onto the terrace floor, her arms outstretched to break her fall. She

bumped her shins on the ledge, skinning them even through the sweatshirt.

She lay crumpled on the terrace, safe. Viveca looked up and saw Alec sitting against the wall of their apartment, the rope looped twice around his body and once around the cast on his arm. The cast was cracked. Small white particles of plaster lay about him.

“You pulled me up!” Viveca gasped.

“Yeah,” Alec smiled at her.

“I could have. . . .” Viveca began and then stopped. “Thank you,” she said. “I was in real trouble there.”

“I know,” Alec said. “I was afraid you were going to panic but I should have known better. I was going crazy up here, thinking what could happen. I should have trusted you more, known that you wouldn’t mess up.”

Viveca looked down at the ropes around her. She stood somehow and staggered over to him. “I messed up,” she said. “Look at this.” Viveca pointed at the body harness. “Look how I put this on.”

Alec saw the double hitch and the granny knot. He went pale. “Jeezus!” he said fervently.

“I forgot everything,” Viveca said. “It’s worse than a beginner’s work: it’s something only an idiot would do.”

“How could you risk your life with that?” Alec whispered. “Don’t you care? What happened to you?”

Viveca burst into tears. “I didn’t think! I just wanted to come home!”

Alec leaned back against the terrace wall. His arm was aching fiercely yet he was smiling. The broken plaster cast crunched under him as he shifted his weight.

“Don’t laugh at me!” Viveca sobbed.

“I’m not, not ever,” Alec said. “I’ve never laughed at you.” He held out his good arm. Viveca shifted her position, moving closer until she was half within the circle of his embrace.

"It's such a mess, Alec," she said. "I hate all of it."

"I know," Alec said. "So do I. What it's become, what we turned it into."

"Do you? I thought you were happy. I thought you liked all this."

"No, you didn't," Alec said fiercely. "Don't lie."

"You're right, you're right," Viveca stammered. Her tears were drying, fading into hiccups and a runny nose. "We haven't really talked to each other in years, have we?" she asked.

"No," Alex said.

"I'm sorry." Viveca said. "It's been awfully bitchy of me, hasn't it?"

"Bitchy isn't the word," Alec said. "It's been beyond that, Viveca. It's been. . . . lonely."

"Oh, my dear," Viveca said. There was an almost crooning sound in her voice. She touched his face tentatively. It had been a long time since she had felt his skin beneath her fingers and it had the strangeness of all unexpected transformations. The unfamiliar texture of his skin spoke to her as if for the first time. He was so usual, so daily, so expected and yet so odd, so foreign. She realized that she loved him still, and that she loved him again, and that she loved him newly with the frightening power of transmuted emotions. She touched him more boldly now, knowing that he was watching her warily, hopefully, not yet trusting. She touched him more daringly and he pulled her against him, his body clenching with pain as his broken arm moved.

"The cast," Viveca said.

"Fuck the cast," Alec growled as they struggled to meet. She sensed that they had done this before, in exactly the same way. They had had to be careful then, too. Where had it been? Some breeze-carried odor reminded her: it had been in the plane, in the Kalihari. They had had no room in which to move. Now there was room but his broken arm hampered

them. They had always found a way before and she was eager for him so she knew they would find a way again.

The sweatsuit pants were around her ankles. She kicked them away. She pried the blouse over her head and Alec buried his face between her breasts. She could feel his lips and tongue and teeth on her skin.

They fitted together as if they had never been apart. She braced her legs to take the weight of both their bodies, keeping his broken arm safe. It made it difficult to move, so she left it all to him, content to rock her body in response to his. It was familiar territory they were covering now, yet there were differences in his movements and in her response. Time, and other partners, had changed and instructed them. Viveca felt her body reaching for him and then his good arm was around her hips, holding her firmly as he set about to bring her home. She heard him say something but her attention was taken by the sensations rising within her and it was only after her head had cleared again that she understood the words. He was panting them now, as he set about his own pleasure and there was no anger in her as she heard the hoarse, driving repetition. There was only contentment and a smilingly salacious plan for the next hour and the next day and, perhaps, the rest of their lives.

“Come on, come on,” she urged him, welcoming him, calling him, cradling him, finally, as Alec trembled and raced and shivered to a peak his voice chanting “old girl, old girl,” in rhythm with his body.

Everything was packed. The movers would come tomorrow and take her oddly-matched pieces of furniture to the new apartment above the Sunset Strip. It was smaller than this sunlit, ocean damp place in Newport Mews but Dina thought she would have no trouble adjusting. The view was good even if the bedroom was small and the kitchen part of the living room. There would be a carport for the battered

VW and more privacy, even though the houses were on top of each other. There were bushes and plants and stunted trees and fire warning signs on the curving roads leading up the hill, and the ocean was far away.

Gigi had moved last week, taking a studio apartment nearer the hospital. She had never forgiven Dina for the night she had spent in jail, after the demonstration. They had lived together, barely speaking, for a long time. Then, one day, Gigi had packed her bags and gone, not even apologizing for leaving Dina with the entire rent to pay.

“My last night here,” Dina thought as she lay down on the unmade bed. She was fully clothed, ready to rise from sleep, ready to leave.

She was surprised that she was not sad, or nostalgic, about the life she had lived here. She took a certain satisfaction in the fact that she could still feel hope, that she could still believe that a move meant a change in her life. Dina had not yet reached the time in her life when she would know that she took herself wherever she went, and that the only thing that changed was the decor.

Dina wrapped herself in an old comforter and pulled the bare pillow down into the curve of her neck. She snuggled into the warmth caused by her body under the coverlet. Tomorrow the air around her would no longer smell of salt sea and air conditioning. Tomorrow she would breathe the odor of dried vegetation and overheated cement and the acid tang of her own skin reacting to the smog that lay over the Los Angeles Basin.

She slid quickly into sleep and then felt herself tilting and dropping, surrounded by a great, groaning noise and the sound of metal tearing and wood ripping.

She was standing, off-balance, leaning forward to stay on her feet. She tried to turn on the light but it would not respond to the switch flicking back and forth. She staggered into the living room, smelling wood dust and feeling the dry, tickling scratch of bits of insulation against her face. She remembered

that she had packed the flashlight last, planning for tomorrow and the possibility that the electricity would not have been turned on in her new apartment.

She found the flashlight and flipped it on, sending the beam of light to scour the walls of the apartment. She could not understand what the light revealed. There was a loud, yawning sound and the floor trembled under her feet.

‘Earthquake,’ she thought, although it did not sound like any earthquake she had ever experienced. She trudged up the slight incline to her front door and opened it.

There were people in the hallway. They wore sleeping costumes of staggering variety, shorts and tee-shirts and jogging costumes. One daring man wore pyjamas. Some of the people were barefoot and some were shod in sandals or tennis shoes. One woman teetered by on platform clogs. A man broke into a run and then slowed after three, loping steps. The amazing thing was the quiet.

The people spoke in low voices, calmly, but their faces were tight and shiny, the eyes blank. They did not look at each other but talked as if addressing the walls. Dina saw people carrying things. One woman was holding a large fern; a man had a fishing rod in his hand, another man balanced a single waterski over his shoulder. A young girl went past, carrying a clandestine cat in her arms. Animals were forbidden here and no one had ever suspected her of harboring a criminal resident.

A man’s voice rose and then calmed again. Dina moved back into her apartment, stepping gingerly as if fearing that an awkward step might upset the delicate equilibrium of the building. The flashlight revealed the gaps in the walls. Earlier, she had not been able to understand what she was seeing. Now she realized that entire panels of fiberboard had torn away from their anchorage. A corner gaped and she could see the studs separating, some leaning inward, toward the room, others resting against the conduits within the walls.

Dina found her purse, tucked it under her arm and returned

to the corridor. She joined the parade of tenants moving toward the exit. There was a pile-up just before the doors and she wondered what was holding up their progress until she saw that the panels leading to the outside had shattered and that people were picking their way across the shards and splinters of glass.

There were men outside, helping people down the steps and urging them to move away from the building. Some of the tenants were obeying, straggling away singly and in twos and threes, some turning to look back, others not caring to. Now that they were outside and presumably safe, the complaints were beginning. "What about my clothes?" a woman asked peevishly. Someone else inquired about her furniture. Some people had stopped walking away and had returned to stand, staring at the building.

Dina paused long enough to ascertain exactly what had happened. She could only see her own building. There was no telling what had happened elsewhere. The walls were cracked through in several places. Down toward one end, the outside walls on the second and third floors had fallen away, sliding down the face of the building until they crashed into the ground. One large piece of wall leaned against a first floor apartment where it had come to rest, as if catching its breath, or as if holding itself from crumbling into small pieces. The entire building looked as if it had bent backward, bowing toward the water on the far side, arching toward the sky inland. What windows were still intact glared up at the moon, reflecting it like a series of wavering white cataracts set in dark eyes.

"What happened?" Dina asked a man standing next to her.

"I don't know, man," he whined. "We were balling and the earth moved, man, and that's no joke."

Dina listened to him calmly, knowing that she was calm, wondering at how calm she was, congratulating herself on her calm.

There were revolving juke-box lights now, red and white strobes flashing and making it feel as if the temperature had risen ten degrees. The lights triggered the people into nervousness and there was a new stir and restlessness in the crowd. The King's Rest security police moved ineffectually through the crowd, suggesting that people go elsewhere, shrugging when they were asked where they were supposed to go.

Sheriff's cars arrived and the atmosphere became less gentle: now no allowance was made for shock.

"Okay, move out of the area. Miss? Get away from the building. Sir? Take your lady away from here." The polite forms of address were extremely threatening for the voices of the sheriff's men were cold and businesslike.

Dina saw Mallorey Swann walking purposefully away from the building, carrying a suitcase and a large totebag. She hurried to catch up with her.

"Are you all right?" Dina asked.

Mallorey nodded. "Just fine. Unbelievable, isn't it?"

"I got out right away," Dina said. "But you stopped to pack." She realized that there was an accusing tone in her voice. It seemed totally unfair that the other woman should walk away from a disaster so neat, so organized, so untouched.

"You want me to help carry something?" Dina asked, ashamed of her feelings of envy.

"No, thanks, that's okay." She looked at Dina, seeing her bereft of possessions. "All your clothes still inside?" she asked.

Dina nodded. "I was moving tomorrow morning." She looked back. As they walked further away from the building she could see the crazy angle at which it was leaning. "Slippage," Dina said. "That's what we were demonstrating about. I always thought it was just a question of cracked walls and uneven floors, even though I saw the engineering report. I never could quite believe that it was unsafe, even when we

were making a lot of noise about it."

"You have somewhere to sleep tonight?" Mallorey asked.

"No," Dina said.

"I'm going to the Spire Club. You want to come along?"

Dina looked back at the collapsed building again. She could not seem to keep from staring at it. Fire engines were there now, and ambulances. And a television remote truck.

"Uh-oh," Mallorey said. "The big-eye press. Let's get out of here."

Dina agreed. "I'll meet you there," she said and then, smiling sheepishly, she added: "Which Spire is it?"

Mallorey found nothing strange in Dina's ignorance. "Is your car on first level?" Dina nodded. "Okay, just follow me. I'm driving a silver Porsche."

The reaction set in after they reached the Spire Club. Dina began to shiver in the elevator. Mallorey saw her shaking and realized that she should put her arm around those shoulders but she was carrying the bags and it did not occur to her to put them down. They got out of the elevator and stood in the space just in front of the Neptune Bar, Dina shivering, Mallorey trying to figure out what to do with those things she was holding in her hands.

"We should, we should," Mallorey said. Dina could not answer her. "Something," Mallorey said. "We should do. . . .we should. . . ."

"My Lord, what's wrong with you?" Sonny DeLane asked, walking up to them with drunken exactitude.

"House fell down," Mallorey told him. She laughed. "This is, uh. . . ." she looked at Dina. "I know her name, but I can't remember it. What's your name?"

Dina shivered. She forced her teeth together in an effort to tell her name but the breath would not come up from her compressed lungs.

"Dina," Mallorey said. "Quick study. Never forget my lines. Not a good actress but never forget my lines."

"We'll worry about that later," Sonny said. "You both need a drink." He put a heavy, comforting arm around Dina. His free hand took the totebag from Mallorey. "Hold on to me, now," he said and led them into the dark of the bar.

"Three cognacs," he called to the bartender. "Doubles."

"Tea," Mallorey said. "I could use some tea."

"And two cups of tea," Sonny added.

He placed himself between the two women and held them tightly. To his credit the idea that someone might see him with his arm around two good-looking women barely brushed his mind before he forgot about it and concentrated on holding them.

The cognac came. "The tea," Sonny said brusquely, reminding the bartender. "We need that tea."

He handed a snifter of brandy to Mallorey. "Can you handle that?" he asked. Mallorey nodded too quickly, her head bobbing up and down in nervous agreement. She held the snifter in two hands and took three quick swallows. She began to cough. Sonny handed her the multi-colored silk handkerchief he always wore in his breast pocket. It was wrinkled from constant refolding and arranging. "Here," he said. "You're crying and your nose is running. Mop up." He turned to Dina, holding another of the snifters in his hand. "I'm going to feed you this," he said. "You drink it slow, now." Her teeth tapped against the glass before she could swallow. "Easy," Sonny said. Dina drank the glass dry. The shivering lessened and then stopped. "That's better," Sonny said. He kept his arm around her. "Now, what was your name again, honey?"

"Dina," she replied. "Thanks for the drink."

"What are you doing here?" David's voice asked. He came out of the gloom and stood on the far side of the table, looking curiously at the strange trio. Sonny had his arm around both women again and they were leaning against him, even though their trembling had begun to resolve itself into small spasms.

"It seems the house fell down, whatever the hell that means," Sonny said. "We're pretty upset here."

Dina looked up at David. She had not seen him in a long time. It was like meeting someone she had never known. He looked ineffectual. "Newport Mews collapsed tonight," she said harshly. "We told you it was unsafe."

"What do you mean, collapsed?" David demanded, not believing her.

"Slippage," Dina said. "We warned you about slippage. We told you and told you and told you and you wouldn't do anything."

"Was anybody hurt?" David asked warily. He was thinking about damage suits.

"We don't know," Mallorey said mildly. "But don't you think you should call the owners and get them over there?"

"Of course," David said. "They'll want to know. But there's no use bothering them if it's minor."

"There are police and sheriff's officers and ambulances and the fire department and television news people there already," Dina said. "And there are all those tenants with no place to sleep tonight."

"Why don't you ask some of them up here?" Mallorey suggested. "There's plenty of room for them to camp out in the main dining room and here in the bar."

"Here?" David said. "This is a private club. I'm sure the police will work out something for anyone who can't find a place to bed down." He smiled meaninglessly and then walked away from them, toward the bar. They saw him ask for the telephone and dial it.

The two women looked at each other briefly before asking Sonny DeLane to order them another round of drinks. The tea arrived and they warmed themselves with it, fighting off the chill of disaster and the retroactive fright. Mallorey kept her arms crossed over her breasts, protecting herself. Dina kept touching and brushing at her own face, as if trying to reassure herself it was still there.

"You want to sleep at my place tonight?" Sonny offered.
"I've got two empty bedrooms with the beds all made up."

"Thank you," Mallorey said. "I'd appreciate that."
"Dina?" Sonny insisted.

"No, thanks. The movers are coming at nine. I'll have to be there. I'm going to have to make arrangements. . . ." She hesitated, realizing how impossible it might be to retrieve her belongings from the wreck of the building. "Maybe I can talk the firemen into moving my stuff out into the access road. I could sleep in the car and then see. . . . tomorrow. . . ." Her voice trailed away.

David slammed the receiver down and then came back to the table.

"No answer," he said. "Whenever you want to get hold of him there's always some problem. . . ." He saw Dina sliding out from behind the table. "Where are you going?" he asked, surprised.

"Back to what's left of my apartment," Dina said drily.

"As long as you're going over there, could you give me a lift?" David asked.

"No," Dina replied and walked away from him. They heard the faint sound of the elevator door opening and closing again.

"She must be upset," David said lamely.

"She almost got killed tonight," Mallorey said coldly. "She's probably lost all her clothes and furniture. And it's your fault, isn't it? You had advance warning and nothing was done. You can't expect her to do you favors now."

"Why don't you just take your own car?" Sonny asked. He thought it was damn insensitive of David to treat the girls that way.

"Uh, it's in the shop," David said.

He had told nobody that his car was gone. He had called the garage this morning and asked them to bring his car around and the attendant had told him then that a Marshall had come, with repossession papers, and had hauled the

Mercedes away. David had hurried downstairs and grabbed the papers from the apologetic, grinning attendant's hands. He had read the papers and gone into a rage. Denny Brock had taken a personal loan, using David's car as collateral. The payments had not been made. Of course, David had reasoned with himself, Denny had every right to do so: King's Rest actually owned the car now. Then, again, shouldn't the loan have been taken by King's Rest? Denny had misrepresented his ownership of the car. Unless King's Rest had sold the car to Denny Brock in one of those paper transactions that Denny Brock loved, and that David had often done for him in the past.

"Didn't you rent a car?" Sonny asked. He was perplexed. How could anyone live in the Marina, or anywhere for that matter, without a car?

"Uh, no, I walked to work." It sounded lame. "It's not that far," David said, "and I wasn't planning on going anywhere tonight."

He would have to rent a car in the morning. He had realized that he would have to pay off the loan on the car in order to be able to retrieve it. It was infuriating that Denny would have forgotten to pay off the loan and that he would be forced to pay twice for the same car. David had tried to telephone Denny Brock immediately after he had found the car gone, but Brock was nowhere to be found. His anger had only cooled down toward the evening, although he was determined that Denny Brock would pay for this injury, along with the more serious ones he had inflicted on David.

"Take my car," Sonny said, handing David his keyring. "It's a dark brown Rolls."

"Thanks," David said, "I'll bring it back in one piece."

Sonny looked at him worriedly. It had not occurred to him that anything might happen to his car in David's hands. Now he saw how agitated the other man was and he regretted his gesture. It was too late to back down, and he watched with

some trepidation as David, without another word, waved a careless good-bye and headed toward the elevator.

"Oh, well," Sonny said grimly, "let's hope nothing happens."

"What?" Mallorey asked.

"Uh, nothing. Well, old girl," Sonny said with nervous cheerfulness, "let's get you bedded down for the night." He grimaced at his own clumsiness. It had sounded as if he were talking to a horse.

"Yes, okay," Mallorey said wearily. She had noticed nothing amiss in the way Sonny had spoken to her. She was comforted by his blundering heartiness. It made him seem safe, like somebody's not-too-bright uncle.

The Red Cross had put the people up in a high school gym, not far from King's Rest. It had taken them until four in the morning to get organized but finally all the tenants had left and the firemen had moved in with axes. They had had to wait until morning for the question of jurisdiction to be settled. Since King's Rest was unincorporated anywhere, existing on no county's organizational chart, there had been some question as to who would have to take over the job of clearing away the rubble.

Meanwhile, soils engineers who worked for the state had come in, followed by structural engineers. Dina had wandered around the area, managing to escape the attention of the sheriff's men for several hours. They were too busy organizing the exodus of tenants in private cars and hastily provided school buses.

Dina overheard several officials talking together and she offered the information that a report existed on the state of the underlying landfill; the report was in a box in her apartment on the second floor and someone would have to go into the building to get it. There were questions about how she happened to be in possession of such a report. She told them

the story. They thought she was hysterical, or crazy, or hallucinating, or just wanting to be noticed. Then Dina began quoting sections of the report from memory and they believed her.

Nobody wanted to go into the building before they knew whether it would collapse further, but Dina offered to get the report for them. Someone volunteered, then, all of the men feeling uneasy and hating her for forcing them to act.

"While you're in there," Dina said to the volunteer, "take a look and see if I can get some of my stuff out today. I'm moving and the van is due in the morning."

They told her that nobody would be able to come into the area but Dina was determined and she wheedled and complained and became tearful and argued reasonably and irritated them so much that they finally agreed to see what they could do. Then she told them exactly where to find the report and the volunteer went into the building. He came out fifteen minutes later, holding two cartons in his arms.

"Here," he said, dumping the cartons at Dina's feet, "I figured as long as I was there. . . ."

Dina smiled at him, as dazzling a smile as she could muster, while her mind tried to figure the odds of retrieving all her belongings. "Did you find the report?" she asked sweetly, thinking of Gigi and the way she spoke to men.

"Yeah, right where you said it would be."

"Are my clothes safe? My furniture?"

The man grunted and walked away. Other men arrived. They all seemed to know what to do and they did not seem to be in a hurry to do it. Evidently the jurisdictional dispute had been settled and now the main job could begin. Dina removed the two cartons to her car and returned to stand where they could see her, where she would be a constant reminder that she took it for granted they would help her. They could have forced her to leave but it never seemed to occur to them. She sat on a curb and then, later, when the sun rose, she sat

under a tree, watching them as they went about their job.

The first question that had to be settled was if there was anyone left inside the building. When sounding devices showed nothing untoward happening within the rubble, no screams, no moans, no breathing sounds, some of the firemen became bolder and began to explore the building in groups of four and six, making sure that there were no dead bodies inside.

When she realized what they were doing, Dina drove away, returning within the hour with pizza and coffee, the back seat of the car, the passenger seat, the front trunk piled with food.

After that, from time to time, a fireman would show up carrying another package, or a suitcase, rescued from her apartment.

David had been there, in the very early morning, and then, again, after dawn. They chased him away, angered by the Rolls, or by his attitude. He demanded to know the situation, he demanded to know whether anything could be salvaged. He wanted to know what their plans were. He wanted to know *when* they would know what their plans were. He wanted to know when the *hell* the engineers would show up and, later, why they were bringing in bulldozers. He demanded to know who had ordered all the yachts moved from the slips in this part of the marina, and by what authority. He threatened to get a court injunction to stop them from this indiscriminate destruction of private property.

Between sorties against the stubborn, unthinking, bureaucratic minds running this operation, David spent his time on the telephone, trying to find Denny Brock. To no avail.

He returned to the scene of the catastrophe one last time, in the middle afternoon, to find a deputy, armed with a rifle, guarding the approaches to Newport Mews.

“But I’m the attorney for King’s Rest!” David insisted.

The deputy was unimpressed. "We're guarding against looters," the deputy said, "Nobody is allowed into the area. Get going now, sir."

"What about her?" David asked angrily, pointing toward the small figure about a third of a mile inside the Mews. Dina was sitting on a chair, one of the small pieces of furniture that had been accumulating around her during the day.

"That's not my business, sir," the deputy said, showing how patient he was being. "You'd better leave now," the deputy said, sliding his hand up the barrel of the rifle, as if he was getting ready to swing it. "And don't come back." David left.

Dina remained. By nightfall all of her furniture, except for her couch, was piled up around her. She was on a first-name basis with some of the firemen. Another fire company came in to relieve the men who had been working since early morning. Her friends introduced her to the men of the new company, and explained the situation. Later in the evening Dina made another trip outside the marina, this time buying fried chicken and soft drinks for the firemen she had come to think of as her men. She did not forget to give a portion of food to the armed deputy guarding the access road. The Red Cross had set up a feeding station outside the disaster area but Dina's men never went near it.

By midnight all her belongings were once more in her possession. She slept in the open that night, on the couch, the last piece of furniture to be brought to her. Work went on around her, but she did not hear it.

In the morning two of her firemen from the night shift went off duty and returned with a rented truck. They loaded her belongings onto the truck and followed Dina to her new apartment. They unloaded her things and brought them into the house. One of her firemen took the rented truck back to turn it in and pick up the car they had left at the rental office. While he was gone the other fireman raped Dina.

Afterward, he explained that he was depressed and very tired. He had worked two shifts at the disaster site, and his wife had left him six weeks ago, and he hated going into collapsed buildings because he had a recurring nightmare that he would die under a falling roof. His nerves were shot and he needed a vacation. Then he fell asleep.

When his friend returned they decided to go back to the firehouse early, even though they were not expected back for another two hours.

Dina never reported the rape.

She always thought of it as another detail in that mad patchwork night when everything fell apart. It seemed evilly right and logical, just as much a part of the pattern of collapse as the wailing sirens, the red and white lights and the yowling sound the building made as it disintegrated.

XXI

It occurred to Sonny DeLane that he should leave King's Rest. Viveca and Alec had closed their apartment and gone. He had received one letter from them, postmarked Belize.

"Waiting for replacement parts for the plane," Viveca had written. "Meanwhile, enjoying the sun and crayfish. Potent local drinks would suit you, also lots of lovely girls. Moving on as soon as plane ready. Best to everyone, V."

Sonny did not know where Belize was, but Viveca sounded happy enough, which was more than he could say for himself. He sensed the slipping reputation of the Spires. There were new faces now, a more vulgar crowd. They all seemed to dress too well, clothing themselves in fads rather than in style. Complete strangers thought nothing of speaking to him, rather than waiting to be spoken to. And there were even people who ignored him. He could not decide which was worse.

Timmons was treated like a celebrity. He spoke to everyone and was considered a regular guy, not like "some of your other show business types." Sonny was disgusted at the way Timmons cheapened himself, flirting with the wives, playing tennis against the husbands at one hundred dollars a game stakes. Timmons never let anybody win. Strangely enough, some of those new men seemed to love being beaten by him.

Sonny began spending most of his evenings outside the marina, in the more staid enclaves peopled by his peers. He

met Consuelo at a dinner party. She was escorted by a man younger than herself. Over coffee and liqueurs she and Sonny reminisced about the months of Joshua's dying, neither one of them bringing up anything that might embarrass the other. It was a surprisingly comfortable evening and Sonny came away with a new appreciation of Consuelo's intelligence after she gave him a few tips on real estate speculation. It was immediately after that he decided to buy two houses: one to live in and one to rent out. Now he was simply waiting until his new home was fit to move into: the decorators had promised it within the month and it had already been six weeks. Sonny was becoming impatient. He began driving toward his new house every evening, scouting congenial bars in the area.

Peter had leased an office in the marina. He had been busy since the night Newport Mews collapsed. Most of the victims had taken refuge in the high school gymnasium and Peter followed them there, plans already made and ready to be implemented.

The victims of the collapse remembered Peter very well. They had come to know him during the time of the demonstration and, even though some of them had spent a night in jail, they were ready to trust him. Peter arrived at the gym at the moment when the shock of the catastrophe was beginning to wear off and anger and bitterness were taking its place. The tenants of Newport Mews had been fed and doughnuttet and coffeeed, they had been cotted and blanketed and first-aided; they were starting to wonder how they would survive, how they would replace what they had lost, and who would pay for the psychiatric help they automatically assumed they would need as a result of the experience.

Peter had the answers for them. He even pointed out some miseries they had not begun to feel but which they suffered almost immediately after he suggested them. Peter told them that a class action suit was not really the right move. They

would be better off with individual lawsuits against the marina's owners. He was no longer interested in making law: he had come to the point in his life when he wanted to make money.

David began to feel that fate and circumstance were in a conspiracy against him. The first shock had been Denny Brock's mishandling of the tournament. The second was the collapse of Newport Mews. The third was the letter from something called Seaside Enterprises, informing him that the apartment in which he was now living had become the property of Seaside Enterprises and that they expected him to vacate the premises within sixty days.

"Who the hell is Seaside Enterprises?" David demanded, having telephoned the number printed on Seaside's cheap letterhead paper.

"Seaside owns a block of apartments in the Spires," he was told by a man's voice. "Including yours. And we need it."

"What are you talking about? Since when? I'm the lawyer for King's Rest and I know nothing about the sale of apartments or any such transactions," David said indignantly.

"Seaside purchased several blocks of apartments from King's Rest about a year ago," the man said.

"What?"

"Yes. And we are asking you to vacate your apartment."

"But this apartment is part of my employment contract with King's Rest," David protested.

"It's true that King's Rest retained usage of several apartments for fifteen months after the contracts were signed. A good-will gesture," the man added. "As for your employment contract, you'll have to take that up with King's Rest Enterprises. That has nothing to do with us."

For the tenth time in as many days David tried to telephone Denny Brock. This time a telephone company recording

broke in to inform him that the number was disconnected.

The King's Rest offices were locked. David tried to find someone from the building's staff but even the superintendent's office was padlocked.

"Where's everyone gone?" David asked, walking into the first office he found on the second floor.

"New management," he was told.

"Who's taking care of the property?"

"Some company called Seaside."

David sat in his ransomed car, trying to understand what was happening to him, and to the marina. He had bailed out the Mercedes at the marshal's office. Handing over the cashier's check had been a galling experience. The car no longer felt as if it belonged to him. He thought of it as, somehow, soiled.

David telephoned the bank that had held the mortgage on the car. The loan officer spoke coldly to him; a month ago the man had been welcoming and eager to do favors. Now he sounded like an angry parent.

"We've been trying to reach you," the loan officer said. "Our vice-president in charge of real estate has been asking to see you."

"I'll have my girl set up an appointment," David said icily. The man should have remembered how much business David had brought his bank. He should have considered future possibilities before speaking in that tone of voice.

"He wants to see you now. I'll tell him you're coming."

David drove the endless stretch of freeway to the center of Los Angeles. The road seemed to undulate and all the other drivers appeared to have gone crazy. They came at David from every direction, cutting in front of him, swerving from one lane to another, blasting their horns in a rising wail as they passed him. He could see their mouths moving angrily beyond the closed windows. David gripped the steering wheel on his suddenly unfamiliar, unresponsive car. He was

determined to drive safely, to pay attention, to arrive at his destination unscathed even though everyone on this freeway seemed determined to force him off the road.

"In the last eighteen months you people remortgaged every piece of property in the marina," Crewe said to David. "Every single mortgage is in default, Mr. Nash. Now, I approved all these loans. You have put the bank, and me, in a very delicate position."

"No payments were made at all?" David asked, trying to appear calm.

"Just enough to keep us from demanding immediate repayment," Crewe said. "Your corporation has become nothing but a shell, Mr. Nash. The assets are gone. We are counting on you to help us clear up this matter."

"I don't know anything about it," David said, knowing that the man would not believe him. David could hardly believe his own words. It seemed incredible to him that he should be here, sitting rigidly in a chair, listening to someone accuse him of fraud, of malfeasance, or theft.

"You are attorney of record for the development company, aren't you? That is a very nasty scam you people pulled."

"I knew nothing about it," David repeated, his voice rising.

"And the Northern California development?" Crewe asked. "Your name is on the report."

"I recommended against it. What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about monies earmarked for land development in Northern California. The new resort."

"There is no new resort," David said. "I recommended against it. Didn't you read the report carefully?" He felt more sure of himself now.

"Mr. Brock seemed to have misunderstood," Crewe said. "Perhaps he was misled?" Crewe settled back in his chair and looked down at his manicured fingernails. "We're not

talking about *loans* now, Mr. Nash; we're talking about how you people siphoned money out of King's Rest."

David slumped in his chair. "What else?" he asked harshly.

"What do you mean, what else?"

"What else did that son of a bitch do and blame on me?"

"You really expect us to believe that you were taken in? That you didn't know what was going on?" Crewe hesitated. "This is very embarrassing, Mr. Nash, because you and I will soon be facing each other in court. We might talk informally about the withheld blocks of real property on which our bank granted mortgages. At the time it looked legitimate enough. After all, one could not suspect that King's Rest could be in any way. . . ." he searched for the right word. . . . "finagled. Very nice work, Mr. Nash," the man said bitterly. "You've screwed a lot of people. After this whole thing is over I'll never get another job."

"Let's pretend I don't know anything about it," David said with exaggerated patience in his voice. "Just tell me what Denny Brock did."

"We were snookered into granting mortgages on King's Rest, without having the entire development as collateral. I'm talking about blocks of apartments in each group of buildings withheld because they had previously been sold to other owners."

"Private owners? In King's Rest?" David said slowly. "Like Seaside Enterprises?"

"You *do* know what I'm talking about, don't you, Mr. Nash?"

"I knew nothing about it until this minute," David said as forcefully as he could. It sounded like a bleat of protest even to his own ears. "This is as much a shock to me as it is to you."

"It couldn't be," the banker said. "This institution holds fifteen million dollars in bad paper on *your* company. The

bankruptcy was the last straw. I should have seen it coming, of course, but I didn't."

"Bankruptcy?" David repeated. Then, understanding, he accepted the inevitability of the pattern and nodded. "Of course: they declared bankruptcy."

"Just before we were ready to call in the loans, Mr. Nash," Crewe said. "Very nice timing."

"What's Seaside?" David asked. "And how come there were no rumors about the problems at King's Rest?"

"Where have you been, Mr. Nash?" Crewe demanded. "There were rumors all over the banking industry even though we tried to keep it as quiet as possible."

David shook his head. "I was busy with other things," he said,

"Seaside, to answer your first question, is a syndicate. It owns approximately eighteen percent of the real property and service corporations in the marina. They seem to be selling off their holdings, piece by piece, to individual investors. Quite simply, they're draining the remaining assets. We've asked for an injunction to stop all property sales in the marina. In case you'd like to know, all the names connected with Seaside are unfamiliar to anyone in our business community. We're checking back east, but it will take some time to discover exactly who these people are."

"Jeezus!" David whispered. "They raped the development."

"You seem surprised," the loan officer said. It sounded as if he did not believe David. "Well, just in case you don't know the rest of it, let me tell you. It won't hurt to reveal exactly how far we've gone in our investigation. By the time it comes up for trial we will have the whole story. You can count on that, Mr. Nash. Where was I? Oh, yes." Crewe closed his eyes and David could see the lids moving as the man scanned his memory for a list of horrors. "One particularly interesting situation exists at the Spire Club. You prob-

ably have noticed that the service has deteriorated there lately.”

David nodded uncomfortably. He had known it and had talked to Denny Brock about it; but, truthfully, he had become so accustomed to the lowering of standards that he had not pursued the matter. He realized, with growing anxiety, that there were many things he had let slide, or had not noticed, or had held back from mentioning.

“At the same time, there was a concerted effort to attract new members. Very nice work you did on the reorganization of the Club, Mr. Nash.”

David did not thank him for the compliment.

“The money obtained in the membership drive did not go to refurbish the club, nor to provide the services one would expect in a country club, Mr. Nash. The money disappeared.”

“Go on,” David said, knowing that he had not heard the worst of it.

The man cleared his throat. “We come to a point I find extremely painful to talk about, Mr. Nash. Newport Mews.”

“It collapsed,” David said.

“In more ways than one, Mr. Nash. King’s Rest was in default on Newport Mews, two weeks prior to the . . . accident.”

“So your bank owned Newport Mews the night the buildings fell down,” David finished for him.

“Yes.” There was a long silence. “King’s Rest stopped payments on Newport Mews approximately six months ago.”

David tried to remember what he had been doing six months ago. Six months ago Dina had walked into his office and asked him to have her walls repaired. He had telephoned Denny Brock and had tried to extract information from him about the trouble at Newport Mews. Denny had told him the ground was settling. And had added that things would get

worse before they got better. He had told David to work something out, to find a way of keeping the tenants quiet. David had misunderstood. He had thought Denny Brock was merely cheap. He had thought it smart business to delay facing the problem until they were forced to.

“He knew,” David muttered.

“Pardon?”

“Mr. Brock might have known,” David said carefully. “I am just trying to recall the details of a conversation we had a while ago.”

“Six months ago?”

“More or less,” David said reluctantly.

“Mr. Brock told you the buildings were unsafe?”

“No, no,” David said quickly. “Not at all.”

There was a heavy silence.

“I’d give anything to get my hands on him,” David burst out.

“So would we all, Mr. Nash. But Mr. Brock will not be easy to find. Nobody seems to know where he has gone.” He looked at David expectantly. “We’ve managed to trace him as far as Miami but we cannot find him, Mr. Nash. At least, not yet.”

“I don’t know where he went,” David said angrily. In his mind there was a hint of an idea. “The Bahamas?” David thought. “He talked about the Bahamas once. When was it?”

“You are his attorney, Mr. Nash,” Crewe said pointedly.

“I don’t know,” David repeated.

There was another long silence, neither man wanting to give the other an edge.

“You realize, don’t you,” Crewe said finally, “that our bank will not rest until responsibility for this fiasco is placed where it belongs.”

David nodded, understanding too well what the man was saying. It came to him that he was finished. He could not

assimilate it, could not feel that the facts had anything to do with him. They would try to place the blame, yes, and he was the only person still available to carry that particular burden. He was the perfect victim. Denny Brock had set him up, had kept him doing busy-work while he maneuvered the finances of King's Rest as a Monopoly player might buy and sell and trade cardboard deeds and slips of luck and charity. No wonder Denny had allowed him to claim the tournament as his own.

David groaned, thinking of how it would look when the tournament financial statement surfaced. He was sure it would show up, probably at just the right moment to bury him even deeper. He would be known as the man who had ripped off a dying movie legend. David had not signed the financial report. Denny Brock had offered him at least that much protection against the coming debacle. But David had not understood. He had insisted on keeping a copy of the financial report. All his papers would be subpoenaed and there it would be, that damn financial report. "I'll have to destroy it," David thought in a panic, knowing, somehow, that Denny Brock had probably prepared for that eventuality, also. There would be proof that he had had the financial report in his possession. He had not reported Brock's milking of the foundation to anyone; not Internal Revenue, not the State of California, not even to the newspapers. The implication was obvious: David had been in on the swindle.

"You're looking pale, Mr. Nash," Crewe said.

David looked at the man but did not see him. He saw only himself over the past few years, saw the way he had preened himself, his peacock strut, his silly little manipulations, his inflated ego. His profound naivete.

David suddenly found himself trying to enumerate the countries that had no extradition treaty with the United States. He quickly gave it up: he did not have the kind of bankroll necessary to claim sanctuary.

"Well, Mr. Nash," Crewe said, rising but not offering his

hand, "I certainly hope you have a good lawyer." The man smiled for the first time. "You're going to need one."

The change came quickly for Malloreys. Joshua's death had been the flint; the collapse of Newport Mews the flame. Sonny DeLane had been generous, in the style that Malloreys had come to think of as Californian. He took it for granted that she would stay on in his apartment until she had rearranged her life. He did not worry about her at all, but merely showed her where the kitchen was and where the linens were kept and provided her with an extra key.

Vincent Say was relieved when Malloreys finally went to see him. "I've been trying to reach you," he said. "Where the hell have you been?"

"Recovering," Malloreys said.

"Oh," Vincent said, inspecting her. He nodded his head, recognizing the metamorphosis. "You're ready to work, right?" he asked.

"What makes you say that?" Malloreys teased.

"Your hair is shiny and your face is changed. You don't look like you're holding on to that childish stuff you couldn't let go of, before. I guess you've grown up, mostly." He waited for her confirming nod. "You looking for a job?"

"No," she said easily. "Not here. I thought I'd go back to New York. I know people there. Or. . ." she hesitated, remembering some of Joshua's last words to her. "I thought, maybe I'd look into regional theater."

Vincent nodded, satisfied. "I've been waiting to hear that," he said. "How'd you like to go to Minneapolis?"

"Minneapolis?" she asked, warily.

"Good theater," he said. "You'd really learn."

"I'd hate to go in cold," Malloreys said and then laughed at her inadvertent pun. "Cold's the word, isn't it?"

"Don't you think you've had enough of the land of eternal sun, for a while?" Vincent said harshly. "I know somebody here. You ready to give it a shot?"

"It's a big step," Mallorey said, suddenly afraid to cut herself adrift from the familiar difficulties of New York. "I mean, I have friends in New York."

"Yeah, well," he said, as if friends were of no importance, "you can always go back to the big city and take classes with Adler, or at the Neighborhood Playhouse. That's not the point, though. In Minneapolis you'd be *acting*. I'm old-fashioned, Mallorey: I believe in learning through doing. It's time to cut yourself loose from the classroom. Right?"

"Minneapolis," Mallorey said again. Even to her own ears it sounded as if she was saying: the sticks.

Vincent waited. Mallorey finally smiled at him. "Okay. Minneapolis. But you're sure about this?"

"They're waiting for you," he said. "I called them a couple of months ago and told them about you. They're going to give you a try."

"Oh," Mallorey said, stunned. She sat down. "But how did you know? What did you tell them? What play? What kind of role? Listen, how much does it pay? Where would I live?"

"Calm down," Vincent said. He smiled at the questions and at the implied list of priorities in Mallorey's mind. "It pays enough for you to rent a small apartment. It's repertory theater, sweetheart. Second leads for a while, until they're convinced it will work out. You'll be working with some of the best. Good training, Mallorey, and I give you eight to five you'll be back here within two years."

"What for?" Mallorey asked with disgust. "There's nothing left here for me."

"Why, for the movies, darling," Vincent exclaimed. "For the movies."

"I never want to see another movie camera. . . ."

"Bullshit, sweetheart," he said. "You *love* the movie camera, almost as much as it loves you. Only, this time," he

said harshly, "pick your roles carefully. You use the bastards; don't let them use you."

Malloreys sighed. "Okay," she said.

"Okay? That's it? Okay? Like someone offered you a ham on rye?"

"Yes, okay. Sure. Fantastic. Is that better? Divine. How's that? Oh, Vincent, I'm so excited! You like that? You want me to do a starlet? Oooh, Mr. Say," she whinnied, her voice squeaking, "I'm so ex-cciited!"

Vincent Say laughed. "You'll learn," he said. "Forget the girly stuff, though. You're too old, and too tall. Keep your chest stuck out and your head high. You have to keep your eyes slightly above the hairline, like you're trying to overlook the bald spots, but can't. Be a queen. Be a society bitch. Or a frigging thoroughbred Derby winner."

Malloreys grinned at him. "Gotcha," she said. "I'm almost thirty and you're giving me deportment lessons as if I was seventeen."

"They only respect what they can't touch. They're impressed by people who know what they don't know. If they can define it as "classy" then it intimidates them. But you have to internalize the attitude because they do a lot of very nasty testing, trying to break you, trying to undermine your shtick, trying to prove you're a phony. You have to hold on to it, and the only way to hold on to it is for it to be real. You've been intimidated into weakness, Malloreys, so you've got to break loose. Learn your job. All the front in the world won't help if you don't deliver."

"Do stop carrying on," Malloreys said, as if Vincent Say had done something vulgar. "I understood you the first time." She was speaking kindly, as if to a very foolish man who had overstepped the boundaries of what was proper.

"Not bad," Vincent Say approved. "But you had better believe in what you're doing or they'll tear you apart." He

rubbed his cheek. "If you get in trouble, just telephone. I'm always here if you need me."

"Thanks," Mallorey said. She kissed him on the cheek. He held her a moment too long and then, as if to apologize, patted her firmly on the back.

"When do I leave?" Mallorey asked.

"I have to call them. Within the next ten days, I'd guess." He looked at her slyly. "You want to take a couple more classes before you go? There's a scene I'd like you to do."

"I'd love to," Mallorey said. "Give me a script."

Vincent went over to the battered file cabinet. He rummaged through the top drawer and handed her a script. "Here. It's a love scene. The guy's had the script for three weeks, working on it. You're going to love this one."

She took the script from his hand and opened it to the first page. "*Mayerling*? Are you serious? I'm too old to play *Vetsera*." She looked at Vincent. There was a malicious gleam in his eye. "Who's playing the prince?" she asked. He grinned broadly. "Oh, no," Mallorey said. "Timmons Clarke?"

He laughed out loud. "Yeah. Ain't that a bitch?"

"You want me to play a romantic, head-over-heels in love, sixteen-year-old innocent Viennese countess to Timmons Clarke's manic-depressive, crazy, frustrated prince? You're insane."

"If you can do this," Vincent said, "you can do anything."

Mallorey played the scene. Timmons' Prince Rudolph was dismally healthy. He strode about the stage like an athlete feeling nerves before a meet. His moments of depression and hysteria were startlingly feminine, as if Timmons thought strong emotion a womanly trait. Mallorey was able to control him during their more intimate moments, positioning him by a clever use of her body, pushing him back or forward by the

way she placed herself, holding him with her eyes and her hands, forcing him to respond to her, to Marie Vetsera, carrying him through the entire scene.

The class appreciated what she had done. Each of them had suffered through scenes with Timmons, the suffering made more intense by the knowledge that he was doomed to be a star. They could all sense it, and it galled.

The applause at the end of the scene was more than satisfying; it made Mallorey delirious with excitement. "I think I did it," she said to Vincent Say. "I really think it was all right."

Vincent nodded. "It worked," he said shortly. He would give her no more than that. "You're leaving tomorrow?"

"Yes," Mallorey said. "I'm ready." She looked up at him, her nervousness apparent. "I can't believe I've rid myself of everything. . . except my clothes."

"You don't need anything else," Vincent said. "New start, new life. Leave all the old traps behind."

"Thank you for everything," Mallorey said. "Doesn't that sound awful? But there's no other way to say it."

"Get out of here," Vincent said, pushing her toward the door. "But don't forget to send me the reviews." She kissed him quickly and left.

The morning came slowly for Mallorey. She lay awake and listened to the electric clock hum and wondered what she was getting into. She walked into Sonny DeLane's living room at ten in the morning, dressed immaculately, dressed in serious clothes, her frivolous marina costumes put away.

"You look wonderful!" Sonny said, rubbing his head. He had a hangover. His home was still not ready to move into and it was making him increasingly tense.

"I'm scared," Mallorey said. "And excited. All those good feelings."

Sonny looked at her quizzically. He could not understand how fear could be a good feeling. "I still think you're crazy

to go to Minnesota," he said. "I've been there and, let me tell you, I can never wait to get out."

Mallorey ignored him. He had been telling her horror stories about Minneapolis, or St. Paul, or both together. He never mentioned the name of those towns, insisting on calling them "The Twin Cities."

"You want me to drive you to the airport?" Sonny asked, knowing how good it would look for him to be seen waving good-bye to beautiful Mallorey Swann.

"No, thanks, I've ordered a car," Mallorey said. These last few minutes were awkward for her. "You've been wonderfully generous with me, Sonny."

"My pleasure," he said automatically.

"When will you be moving?" Mallorey asked, knowing that it was his sole object of concern now.

"Any day now," Sonny said heartily. He held his head as a particularly sharp pain stabbed across his forehead.

"Good luck in your new home," Mallorey said. "I really hope you'll be happy there."

"I'm throwing a house-warming party," Sonny said. "Consuelo thought it would be a good idea. She's going to help me do it right."

Mallorey nodded, keeping her face straight. "It sounds like fun," she said. "I'm sorry I won't be here." Sonny nodded and smiled and winced, taking it for granted that it was Mallorey's loss.

"I suppose I should go downstairs," Mallorey said. "The car should be here by now."

"I'll carry your bags down," Sonny said. "It's no use calling the service desk. They're always too busy now. Or the phone doesn't answer."

Mallorey was taking four suitcases and a totebag, all that was left of the complications of her past life. It was amazing to her that she could have given away her furniture, rid her

wardrobe of unnecessary items and thrown away the gadgets that had cluttered her existence.

"Well," Sonny said, watching the driver put Mallorey's things in the trunk, "it's that time, I guess."

"Yes, it is," Mallorey said. She felt an irrepressible urge to giggle. The laughter had been bubbling through her for the past hour. Everything that Sonny said seemed funny. He spoke all the right lines, even with the hangover pounding at him, and it seemed ridiculous that he should strain to be so correct, to keep up his end of the conversation, to show fictitious emotion.

"I'll write," Mallorey said, knowing that she would not, that they might meet years from now and that they would act delighted to see each other and would never mention the correspondence that never was. They were linked by the accident of having lived in King's Rest, and by nothing else.

"You do that. I'll be following your career," Sonny said.

The driver closed the door of the car and Mallorey settled back in her seat. She waved to Sonny DeLane as the car pulled away from the Spires. A moment later she turned and waved again to him, through the rear window, knowing that he expected it and that he would have been hurt if she had forgotten this last gesture.

"What airline?" the driver asked and Mallorey told him. Then, prodded by her memories, she asked him to stop at Portofino. They passed regiments of bobbing masts, ranks of squat buildings devoted to commerce, the aluminum shabbiness of the firehouse.

"Take a right," Mallorey said and the car leaned heavily as it swept into a parking area. "I'll just be a few minutes," she told the driver.

"We've got time," he said.

Mallorey walked out onto the dock and gazed down toward *Moorea Cloud's* anchorage. The great white boat

looked deserted. Then the midships cabin door opened and a figure came out on deck. Mallorey felt her heart leap for an instant before subsiding into disappointment. An unfamiliar man strolled around the boat. Mallorey walked toward *Moorea Cloud*.

“May I come aboard?” Mallorey called to the man.

“This is private property,” he said. “Do you belong here?”

“I used to,” Mallorey answered. “I lived on *Moorea Cloud* for a while.”

“Where?” he asked.

“*Moorea Cloud*,” Mallorey said, pointing to the yacht.

“This is the *Dottie B.*,” he said. “You must have the wrong boat.” He stared at his notebook in exasperation. “You can’t imagine the work I’m going to have to do to put things right. You have to see the shit downstairs to believe it. Their taste is in their ass, if you know what I mean. It’s not going to look all that good, either, but *c’est la vie*, right?”

“They renamed it the *Dottie B.*? ”

“Yeah,” the young man said. “After the wife. You can just imagine.” His shoulders went up in a feminine gesture of disgust. “You can come on board if you like. You look *sympathique*, and what those dolts don’t know won’t hurt them.” He seemed eager for company all of a sudden.

“No, thanks anyway,” Mallorey said. “My car is waiting.” She walked away from *Moorea Cloud*.

The driver was leaning against the limousine’s fender. He was trying to appear casual but she noticed that he kept glancing around as if he was expecting someone to say something to him.

“Let’s go to the airport,” Mallorey said. “This is too depressing.” He closed the passenger’s door and came around to take his place behind the wheel.

Mallorey resolutely turned her mind to the future. She realized that she was leaving the marina with absolutely no

regrets. She would work. She would learn. She would do whatever fortune and circumstance dictated as best for her. She would have to discuss matters with her manager, that long-suffering, patient man whose anguished letters and telephone calls she had stupidly ignored these past long months. "I wonder how much I have left?" Mallorey thought, knowing that, whatever state her finances were in, she would survive. She might even receive the money Joshua had left her in his will when Consuelo tired of lawsuits and litigation.

"Did you enjoy your vacation?" the driver asked politely, taking it for granted that conversation would be welcome.

"I wasn't on vacation," Mallorey said. "I've been living at the marina."

"Oh?" She caught his eyes on her in the mirror and then heard the insinuating tone of his voice. "It's supposed to be a real swinging place," he said. His eyes managed to leer at her speculatively. "They say there's a lot of stuff goes on there."

When Mallorey did not answer, he repeated himself: "Yeah, a lot of stuff going on." He risked a turn of his head away from the traffic, looking at her directly, weighing how far he could go in his questioning.

"Uh," he said, clearing his throat and turning forward again, "you must have had a lot of interesting experiences, living in the marina."

"No," Mallorey said shortly, "not really."



**There are a lot more
where this one came from!**

ORDER your FREE catalog of ACE paper backs here. We have hundreds of inexpensive books where this one came from priced from 75¢ to \$2.50. Now you can read all the books you have always wanted to at tremendous savings. Order your *free* catalog of ACE paperbacks now.

ACE BOOKS • P.O. Box 690, Rockville Centre, N.Y. 11570

ROMANTIC SUSPENSE

Discover ACE's exciting new line of exotic romantic suspense novels by award-winning author Anne Worboys:

THE LION OF DELOS

RENDEZVOUS WITH FEAR

THE WAY OF THE TAMARISK

THE BARRANCOURT DESTINY

Coming soon:

HIGH HOSTAGE

Don't Miss these Ace Romance Bestsellers!

#75157 SAVAGE SURRENDER \$1.95

*The million-copy bestseller by Natasha Peters,
author of Dangerous Obsession.*

#29802 GOLD MOUNTAIN \$1.95

#88965 WILD VALLEY \$1.95

*Two vivid and exciting novels by
Phoenix Island author, Charlotte Paul.*

#80040 TENDER TORMENT \$1.95

*A sweeping romantic saga in the
Dangerous Obsession tradition.*

Available wherever paperbacks are sold or use this coupon.



ace books,

Book Mailing Service, P.O. Box 690, Rockville Centre, N.Y. 11570

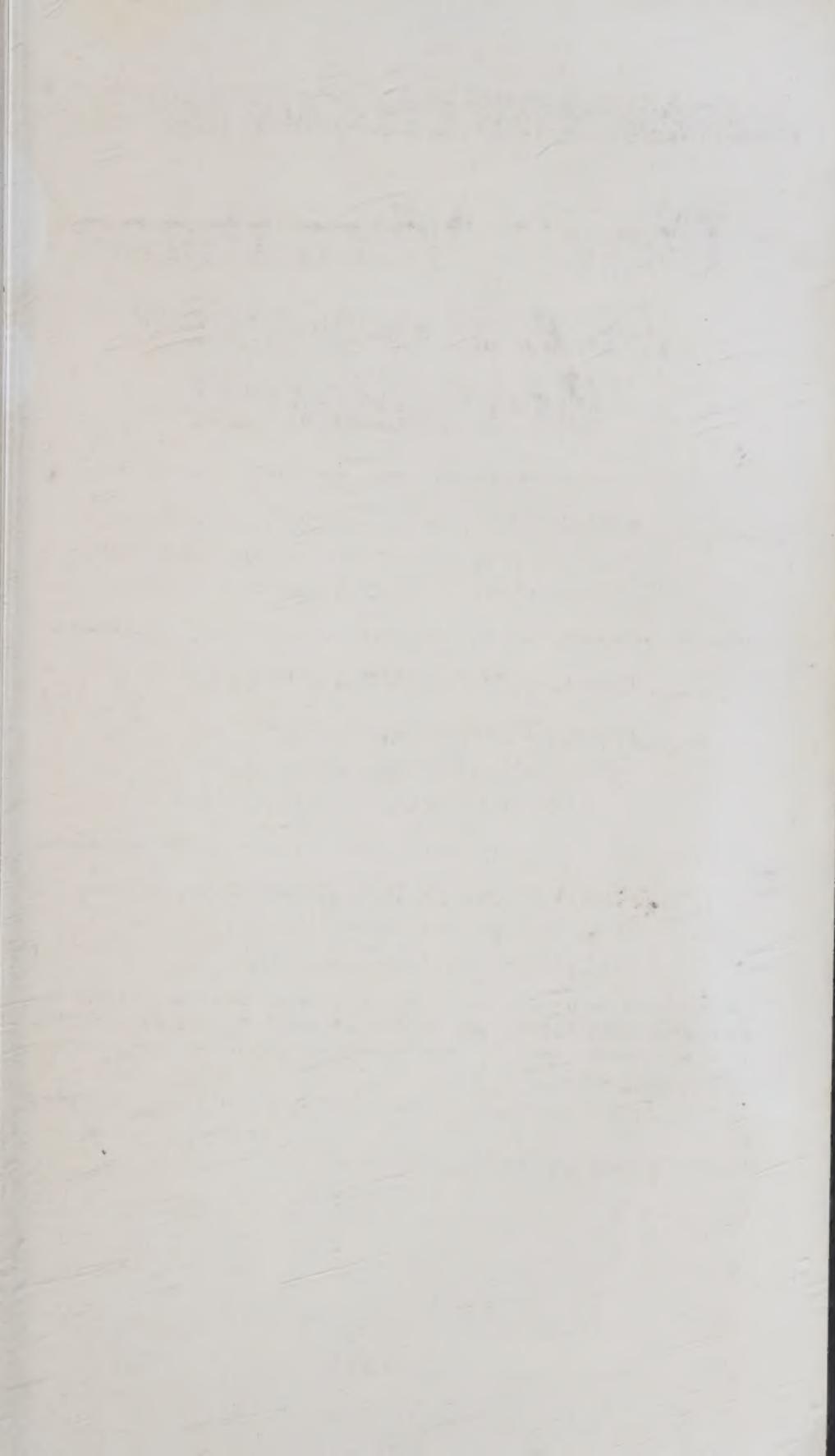
Please send me titles checked above.

I enclose \$ Add 50¢ handling fee per copy.

Name

Address

City..... State..... Zip.....



In a sun-kissed private city, glass-sheltered pent-houses, a yacht-filled marina, and private clubs beckon an exclusive clientele: the extraordinarily beautiful, and rich; the desperately lonely, the voraciously ambitious.

Money, or at least the stage props of it, is the entrance fee, but the cost of living is much higher. The residents must love frequently, play hard, and pretend all the while that they are happy. This towering temple of hedonism has no room for the philosopher-poet, the individualist, the loner. Here propriety is the punch line, morality the joke itself.

Pleasure—the pursuit of it, the possession of it—is the passkey to the palace. But to survive within one must become master of a game...a game of sham and masquerade. The game they call

PARADISE

